

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project
Women Ambassadors Series

AMBASSADOR MABEL MURPHY SMYTHE (HAITH)

Interviewed by: Ann Miller Morin

Initial interview date: May 2, 1986

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Q: Ambassador Smythe, could you tell us a little bit about your family, where you were born, and where you spent your earlier years, a little about your parents?

SMYTHE: I was born in Montgomery, Alabama, the only member of my family to be born there. My parents were both from Camden, South Carolina. Dad went to live with an older sister in Boston when he was a youngster, and he graduated from high school in Boston, then went to Hampton Institute for an agricultural course. Meanwhile, Mother went to Atlanta University, where she took a normal (which meant teacher preparation) course, graduating in 1909. One of her teachers was William E. Burghardt DuBois, and her fellow students included Walter White and James Weldon Johnson.

Q: Where is Hampton Institute?

SMYTHE: In Hampton, Virginia. He was in the class of 1910. And after working two years, in 1912, he went to the University of Wisconsin and was graduated in 1916. I guess it was 1912 that he went back to Wisconsin, and he and Mother were married in 1913 when he was something like twenty-nine years old. My eldest sister was born in Wisconsin, in Madison, and my second sister was born in Oklahoma, after he had gone to teach at what is now Langston University. I was born on his second teaching job at Alabama State. It was then Alabama State Normal School, a teacher's college, and it's now Alabama State University in Montgomery. He stayed there for several years, and when I was four he accepted a job with the Standard Life Insurance Company to organize and run their printing division. He wanted to be a newspaperman, and he had majored in journalism.

Q: What was he teaching all this time?

SMYTHE: English.

Q: So he wanted to be a journalist?

SMYTHE: Yes. So we went to Atlanta, where my brother was born later. All four of us were born in different states. Before the Depression came, he saw trouble coming in the insurance company and left six months before it failed and started his own printing business. That business is still in existence in Atlanta, and he ran it until he was eighty-five years old.

Q: Did your mother-well, she kept the home. She was a traditional-

SMYTHE: She did some dressmaking and was always at home. After the last of us left-there were four children-she spent a year as dean of women at a little college in Georgia, Fort Valley State College, and then decided that commuting to Atlanta was a little much and became what was called "university hostess" at Atlanta University. She was the meeter and greeter and she also supervised the dormitory matrons and took care of visitors and so on. This was in the 1940s and 1950s and 1960s. She didn't retire from that until she was seventy-eight years old. She was also president of the Atlanta University Alumni Association, the national organization, for twenty-two years (she was a graduate of Atlanta University).

Q: That's quite unusual, isn't it, for a woman of that generation?

SMYTHE: Right. And especially during the time before civil rights got well established. A lot of this happened back in the days when there was a great deal of segregation in the South and things were very often difficult because of that.

Q: Of course. So you certainly had heavy overtones of academia all through your growing up?

SMYTHE: Yes. As a matter of fact, I should show you one thing. I think I can get it quickly. [Recorder turned off] . . . The U.S. Office of Education made a grant to Horace Mann Bond to do a study of African American holders of the Ph.D. which could account for their intellectual achievements. Dr. Horace Mann Bond selected Andrew Brimmer, who was the first black governor of the Federal Reserve Board system, and Adelaide Cromwell Hill, a prominent Africanist at Boston University, and me, among the Ph.D.s he was looking into. One day Mother saw him and she showed him a copy of these papers. This is a copy of my mother's paternal grandfather's Certificate of Freedom, and it is an unusual document. There were a number of free Negroes in that period, but very few with a documented tie to Africa, and this tells his genealogy back to Africa and to England, because there was intermarriage in Africa with two Englishmen, Thomas Corker and William Cleveland-not, however, mentioned in the Certificate of Freedom.

Q: J.H. Beckman, Esquire? Is that the one?

SMYTHE: No. Not Beckman-he's simply a magistrate who took the affidavit from Col. Charles Kanapaux, a magistrate who knew Andre Dibble. The intermarriage occurred when Thomas Corker and William Cleveland were in Africa. Thomas Corker went to Sierra Leone in 1684 and sent his half-African son back to England to be educated. One of his descendants married the Englishman, William Cleveland years later. There is a not-too-apt attempt at translating the archaic language into today's patterns, and I take issue with some of it, but this is roughly accurate. But it's an interesting document, and Dr. Bond was so struck by it that he sent George Bond, his nephew-a sociologist who was doing some work overseas-and I am not sure whether George went overseas to do this work just for Dr. Bond or whether he was already there-but he went into the British Museum and found in the library some documentary evidence of the history of the relatives and got in touch with a man who was doing the history of Sierra Leone, because the Banana Islands are in Sierra Leone. He got in touch with Christopher Fyfe, of the University of Edinburgh, who has written a complete history of Sierra Leone. I have a copy of the short history. Isn't that something?

Q: [Reading documentation] "The genealogy that Andrew Dibble, a free person of color, age thirty-six, a tailor now residing in the town of Camden, is the son of Mindah, the daughter of Beck, who was the daughter of Catherine Cleveland." Isn't that wonderful? 1807.

SMYTHE: Isn't that marvelous?

Q: Yes. Isn't that something?

SMYTHE: And there's a great deal more. I went to the archives in Sierra Leone; the woman in charge at the archives was the wife of the Minister of Finance. She gave me documents with the names of these people on them, and there is one manuscript, a copy of which is in the British Museum, but another copy of which is in Sierra Leone, a real hand copy, about two inches thick, of approximately 200 years of the history of the Cleveland and the Caulker families. Cleveland was the family name of Catherine, the first one who came here, but her mother was a Caulker, and the first ambassador from Sierra Leone to the United States was a Caulker. Most of the ambassadors who have come since have been related to the Caulkers, so they seem to be a prolific and high-achieving family. But I have been over and met a number of them. I've met the widow of the first ambassador and I've met his sister and a number of the children and so on, and we are thinking of having a family reunion in Sierra Leone at some point. That's a very interesting historic prospect.

Q: Fascinating. Where did you find that document?

SMYTHE: My great-grandfather, Andrew Dibble, died and his papers were given to his son, his oldest son, who is my grandfather, and passed by him to his oldest son, and his grandson now has them. But Mother and all the others have copies of these. These photostatic copies were made so every member of the family could have one.

Q: Catherine was the first one, was she?

SMYTHE: She was the first one we know of our family to come to the United States. She came as a free person, on a ship which brought a consignment of slaves below deck. She was apparently met at the boat by a person that we assume was an aunt, or other older relative, Elizabeth Cleveland; and she is the one who attests that Catherine Cleveland was born free and baptized and so on. It tells what ship she came on, and Dr. Bond sent someone to Charleston to look up the ship records and found there was, indeed, a ship Queen of Barrow that came in July, I think, of 1764. It's very interesting to see. This is signed by Elizabeth Hardcastle. At the time that Catherine arrived, Elizabeth Cleveland had apparently not yet married Mr. Hardcastle.

Now, the archives section of the University of Sierra Leone Library has the antecedents of Catherine, not directly traced. They have the arrival in Sierra Leone of William Cleveland, whose brother was secretary of the British Admiralty and who was on a ship that was shipwrecked, and apparently he went ashore, went to work for a Caulker, and ultimately married Kate Caulker, the daughter of the employer. Now, the Caulkers are landowners from a long way back.

Q: How do you spell Caulker?

SMYTHE: It is now spelled C-A-U-L-K-E-R, but the original Thomas Corker spelled it C-O-R-K-E-R. He came from England to Sierra Leone in 1684 and married a woman called Senora Doll. The Portuguese had discovered Sierra Leone, which explains its Portuguese name (for "lion mountain," people thought the hills resembled a lion at rest). Thomas Corker and Senora Doll had a son, Skinner Corker. They sent him to boarding school in England, and he came back, and it was Skinner Corker's daughter, Kate, that William Cleveland married. So William Cleveland married a girl who was a granddaughter of the original Englishman, Thomas Corker.

Q: Isn't that something! You really know your family trees, don't you?

SMYTHE: I spent a little time on this because it was so fascinating, but I confess I didn't have to do much of the work. Christopher Fyfe, a Scots scholar at the University of Edinburgh, did most of it. He was particularly interested in genealogy, and when Dr. Bond learned that Fyfe was writing a history of Sierra Leone, he wrote and asked him if he had heard of any Clevelands, and sent a copy of these papers. Fyfe responded with a great volume of mail, and he corresponded with my mother a little bit about this, because Mother wanted to do a history of the family. So a lot of digging has been done, and if we get a chance to go over as a group, we'll see both Clevelands and Caulkers.

Q: Both lines have continued strongly?

SMYTHE: Yes. Well, the Clevelands are much less numerous than the Caulkers. The Clevelands and the Caulkers had a Hatfield and McCoy kind of situation. One of them murdered one of the others, and a feud ensued that went on for generations. The Clevelands mostly went into the bush, into the area that was the original domain, back in around Shenge and the rural areas. The Caulkers were in town, and a good many of them became prominent people-magistrates and government functionaries and whatnot-so that they tend to be urban, the ones that I know.

Q: You say they're still prominent in the government workforce?

SMYTHE: Yes. Almost every Sierra Leone diplomat I have met has been a Caulker or Caulker-related. John Karifa Smart was Minister of Mines and Labor in Sierra Leone under its first government, under Sir Milton Margai; Smart was an M.D. who became involved with the World Health Organization, and is now living in this country. His mother was a Caulker, so he's a distant cousin, some eight times removed, because it's been that many generations since Catherine Cleveland came to America.

Q: You have better records than most Americans who came from Northern Europe do. For them it starts here. They don't know what went on before.

SMYTHE: That's so. Well, thanks to Christopher Fyfe and the fact that the British hang on to records, there are in existence letters having to do with Thomas Caulker and his return to England two years before his death and all that kind of thing.

Q: What do you suppose prompted Elizabeth to come to the United States? Of course, it wasn't the United States back then.

SMYTHE: Dr. Bond thought that it might have been the desire for an education. I suspected for a while that some of the Caulkers might have been involved in the slave trade themselves and that the original ones might not have. But I have two cousins who have been working much harder than I have on this, and they say they think not, that they were involved in ships chandlery or something of that sort, and they think that slavery was not involved in it. But they were certainly active for a long time.

I went to Sierra Leone several times and on my last visit in 1987, I met and talked with two anthropologists who knew of William Cleveland and showed me a photograph of his grave on Bunce Island in Sierra Leone, where slave trading was concentrated. They assured me that he was such a trader. Presumably Skinner Corker and his father were also involved in the slave trade, and it is clear that Catherine Cleveland, apparently the daughter or granddaughter of the Cleveland-Caulker marriage, came to Charleston on the Queen of Barrow when it carried a cargo of slaves.

Q: This was in 1764 that your (however many great-?) grandmothers came to America.

SMYTHE: That's right. [Laughter] I figured one time that if you took me, as the bottom generation-let's say I'm number eight, my mother's number seven, grandfather's number six, and Andrew Dibble's number five, then Minda (four) was the daughter of Beck (three) who was the daughter of Catherine Cleveland (two), we've got seven generations there. And by the time you get back to Sierra Leone, the last one before Catherine Cleveland, the last one to stay there, was eight generations back.

Q: She stayed in this country? She never went back?

SMYTHE: No. Her grave, unfortunately, is at the bottom of a lake now. My cousins went down to South Carolina, where she remained in Camden. They went to see the land she had owned. They looked at the land records. She became quite a landowner. I'm not sure how or why, but she apparently had a good business head and invested in real estate. They have gone into the old census records and found out where she was, and when we had a family reunion in Charleston about five years ago, the planners chartered a bus and took us to a church which stood on land that she had owned and which had a monument to one of her descendants who donated it. There's a little monument to that descendent and so on, so there are a great many interesting things.

Q: You really have deep roots.

SMYTHE: Yes.

Q: Do I have this right? She married a Caulker?

SMYTHE: No. She was apparently the granddaughter of the marriage of William Cleveland and Kate Caulker. William Cleveland and Kate Caulker had two sons, James and John, and it seems to me that Fyfe figured out that she was the daughter of John, but I wouldn't swear by that. I now have to go back to all the notes.

Q: When one thinks back to eighteenth century times, it was a pretty brave person to pick up sticks and come to a new country. Just crossing the ocean!

SMYTHE: Yes, indeed. And you wonder why they would send her to a slave state. But it may be that the only ship was going to a slave state, and it may be that Elizabeth Hardcastle was in a position to protect her, to see that she had a proper education, and whatnot.

Q: Do you think she came all by herself?

SMYTHE: Yes. I think she was entrusted to somebody, like the captain, or there may have been other people aboard. (I learned, after this interview, that the shipload of slaves was consigned to Henry Laurens.

Q: And, of course, the boat may have been family-owned, if, as you think, they were in that line.

SMYTHE: It could have been. Isn't that fascinating, though?

Q: Oh, absolutely.

SMYTHE: I just noticed-I haven't focused on this-she was brought into the state in the year 1764 by Elizabeth Cleveland, now Hardcastle.

Q: Oh, I see; she came with her.

SMYTHE: So she was an older person. This deserves much more analysis and study than I have given it. Until I retired, I had no time to do anything requiring prolonged research.

Q: Why do you suppose this affidavit was made about this gentleman?

SMYTHE: To support my great-grandfather's claim to freedom.

Q: To support the fact that he was a free man. Imagine having to have a thing like that.SMYTHE: That's right. But it was absolutely essential, because anyone who found that he did not have a master could kidnap him and sell him into slavery and declare that he was lying if he said he was free.

Q: That's Andrew Dibble?

SMYTHE: Yes, Dibble. My mother's maiden name was Dibble.

Q: My goodness. I never have even heard of-I don't know what you call that.

SMYTHE: Mother called them free papers. She said, "Your great-grandfather's free papers." Certificate of freedom.

Q: When you first gave it to me, I thought you meant he had somehow bought his freedom, but this was to prove that he had never been enslaved.

SMYTHE: That's right. And you notice that all of the descendants cited were women, because they traced the freedom through the mother. And if the mother was free, he was free. Just as in matrilineal societies, they reasoned that you can't always tell who's the father, but you certainly can tell who's the mother.

Q: That's right. The Jewish religion goes through the mother. As you say, you know who the mother is, but you don't know who's the father. [Laughter]

SMYTHE: And in those days, they couldn't even do the paternity tests that we have now.

I didn't mean to digress this much, but it just seems fascinating. I'll tell you: that history gave us an inside track to international matters. My parents were much more attuned to what was outside this country than many of their contemporaries, and one of the interesting things is that my grandmother-this was my grandfather's father who had these papers, but my grandmother had traced descent. I did hear it during her lifetime, but I didn't hear very much about the story. When I was about six, I remember my mother's saying we had some African cousins. She was not talking about Sierra Leone. I don't think she saw these papers until I was grown up. She discovered them in talking with my uncle and his wife while we were living in Syria, and she immediately showed them to Dr. Bond. We lived in Syria from '65 to '67, and she sent me a clipping of a newspaper story in the Atlanta Constitution about how her ancestry was traced to Sierra Leone.

But to go back to when I was about six, one of the African cousins came to the United States to enter her daughter in Vassar College, we heard. Another of these cousins was the first African woman ever to graduate from Oxford, and she was not one of the Sierra Leone ones at all. Now let me tell you that story. My grandmother's aunt's husband had been born in what is now Nigeria. He had certain tribal scars on his face. (This is all family legend or discussion.) His enemies captured him in battle, sold him into slavery-which did happen-and he was taken to the United States. He was a very skilled ironworker, and his master, who was in Charleston, I believe, permitted him to earn extra money by working for others. After he finished his duties, if he wanted to do some iron gates or banisters or whatever for somebody, they could pay him to do it and the master would keep the money. Now, he was apparently a very moral man, because he permitted that slave to earn enough money to buy his sons' freedom.

So he bought their freedom, and on his deathbed he said to his two sons, "I have not been able to go back to my home, but I want you to go back to find my people." The two sons left in 1847 when Liberia was founded, and went to Liberia. Six years later in 1853, James Churchill Vaughan (Vaughan was the slave owner's name over here; they took that name) met a missionary from Sierra Leone who was on his way to Nigeria, and the missionary asked if he'd like to go along and be a Baptist missionary (he was a devout Baptist). He went along and they arrived in Nigeria and started working among the Yoruba around Abeokuta. At some point, he started a vocational school for orphans. They say that he found his father's people by looking at the tribal marks on their faces. Some tribal wars ensued. This is written up. You can find accounts of it in the histories.

Q: Now, we're talking Nigeria?

SMYTHE: Nigeria. Vaughan had to flee. His enemies were looking for him to kill him. He fled, taking with him some of the orphans. Those orphans took his name, and so he and the orphans found themselves in Lagos. He went into the hardware importing business and became a rich man. There is still a building, where his business existed, in Lagos. His grandson, I believe, Dr. James Vaughan, an M.D., became the Father of the Nigerian Youth Movement, and Dr. Vaughan's sister is Lady Ademola, the wife of the first chief justice of Nigeria, who is now retired. He was knighted by King George, and she was the first African woman to graduate from Oxford. Her story has been written up by Marjorie Parham, and I can't remember whether the title, *Thirteen Against the Odds* is correct; it seems to me that's the title of it.

Now, some of this is documented by gravestones. (I have photographs of the gravestones). One of his descendants took me to Ikoyi Cemetery in Lagos, where there is the gravestone of the original Vaughan to return. I'm afraid to trust my memory-it's been several years since I checked my fine points-but the original Vaughan married a woman from Benin in Nigeria and had two sons, one of whom was a minister, I think, and a composer of hymns; the other, James Churchill Vaughan-I don't remember now.

Q: He would probably be the father of the doctor, I suppose.

SMYTHE: I think he was. Anyway, I have photographs of all of the gravestones, and their inscriptions are fascinating. The inscription of the original Vaughan to go back, says, "He was part of a numerous family. He left them to return to his homeland." But he was only about twenty years old when he left the United States. One of his sons went back to the United States and found the relatives. The first son to go to Africa went to Liberia in 1847 and to Nigeria in 1853. I think it was the son who went back some twenty or twenty-five years later, in the seventies or early eighties, and looked up the family in South Carolina, and from then on they corresponded. There was not a break in correspondence. So in 1926 when Lady Ademola's mother came-her name was Ada Arabella Moore-she was the daughter of, I think, the first Vaughan to return. She married a barrister named Moore, and their daughter, Kofo-it was Kofonarola. She calls it Kofo; she just calls herself Kofo, because it's too time-consuming to spell out Kofonarola. I saw her in London last year when I was there. I spent the month of February in Africa, and one of the stops was Nigeria and another was Sierra Leone, so I saw relatives in both places. In Nigeria, I saw Sir Adetokunbo Ademola, Kofo's husband. He said she would be so sorry to miss me; she was in London. He brought his daughter with him to a party that was given for me. But, he said, she would be there by the time I stopped by London on my way home, so why didn't I see her? And when I arrived at my London hotel, there was a letter from her, telling her phone number, and we got together. She and her husband maintained an apartment in London, a very nice apartment, so that when any members of the family went there, which they did every year, there'd be a place to stay. She was on her way to Germany for surgery, but she got through it and returned home, and we're still in contact.

We have more frequent contact with a younger cousin of hers, Ayo Vaughan-Richards, who came to study administrative nursing in Chicago. She used to be the director of the state school of nursing in Lagos, and she is the chief nursing officer for Lagos now, and a very interesting person who has her own talk show on Nigerian television. Buy that's another whole story.

Q: Did you know about the family bonds with Africa, as a young girl growing up?

SMYTHE: Yes. In 1926, when Cousin Ada came to the United States.

Q: She was the relative who came.

SMYTHE: Yes. And she visited my grandmother in South Carolina. They had been corresponding. When Cousin Ada died, Kofo gave me one of her shawls so I would have something to remember her mother by. I had never met her mother in person, but she knew of my interest in the family and Mother's interest and she knew that her mother had visited my grandmother.

Q: It sounds to me as if your mother was a person very aware of the world and how we interrelate in the world.

SMYTHE: Very much so.

Q: And this must have had quite an impact on you children, didn't it?

SMYTHE: It did. I remember in the 1930s, Mother had to make a speech. It was for a national NAACP convention. She was a delegate from Georgia. I found that speech forty years later, and it was straight out of women's lib. Gloria Steinem could have made it. It was really marvelous to find it and to have it. I xeroxed it and gave it to the people in the women's rights unit at the Civil Rights Commission.

Q: Your mother had her education by the time she married your father, then?

SMYTHE: Yes. She never got her bachelor's degree. She took the teachers training certificate, because my grandfather felt that girls did not need as much education as boys. Mother was an honor student. She had been sent away to boarding school, because there wasn't a good high school in her town. Then she went to Atlanta University, and she had done so well that the teachers wanted her to go through her last two years of college and get a degree. She never got the degree. She did do some summer work at the University of Chicago later on, but because of helping her brother through medical school-

Q: Sure. I can see why she would get up and sound like women's lib if her brother got the degree but she didn't. From a very early age you must have thought, "I will go to college." There was never any doubt in your mind.

SMYTHE: There was no doubt about that, right. And my father believed that, too.

Q: Can you document your father's family, the way you can your mother's?

SMYTHE: Not very well. My father's father died when he was three years old and his mother died soon after, and he was really brought up by an aunt, who called herself his mother, and we called her Grandmother Murphy. She was married to a man named Benjamin Murphy, and they brought Dad up with their own children. It was with one of their children, who was older, that he and his sister went to Boston as teenagers, and that's why he did get a good high school education at Boston English High School. Later he studied at Hampton Institute (now Hampton University). His bachelor's degree was from the University of Wisconsin.

He valued education. It was because of Dad, particularly, that I went to Mount Holyoke. He knew of the Seven Sisters and had wanted one of his daughters to go to one of them. He and Mother had three daughters in college at the same time, and it was just financially impossible. But when I came along-I was the youngest-I won a scholarship to Mount Holyoke. While that didn't cover everything, I had a friend who was applying at the same time from my school who didn't get as good a scholarship as I did, and she couldn't accept it. So she asked Mount Holyoke if they would assign her scholarship to me, too. Isn't that something?

Q: How nice! And they did it?

SMYTHE: I'm not 100 percent sure they did, but I always felt that she was a very special person for doing that. Mother and Dad took out a loan and Mount Holyoke had a way of taking out an insurance policy, an endowment policy, and if you had a loan, you paid the premiums, and twenty years later, I had the \$1,000 it had taken. It didn't cost as much in those days. The finest colleges in the country were \$1,000, not \$15,000 or \$20,000.

Q: I know it's a splendid school. Which one did your brother go to?

SMYTHE: My brother started out at MIT, and then joined the Navy, which sent him to the V-12 program at the University of Mississippi. After the war, he went to Morehouse College in Atlanta with Martin Luther King, Jr., so that he knew Dr. King as a schoolmate. He also knew Maynard Jackson, who became mayor of Atlanta. They were there at the same time. My sisters both were graduated from Spelman College in Atlanta, of which I am now a trustee. I started out at Spelman and then transferred to Mount Holyoke.

Q: Your mother was obviously a very busy person. Did she run the home as well, and do the cooking? You had a housekeeper?

SMYTHE: That's one thing about living in the South. You could get help cheaply, so we had a housekeeper. And we all helped with the work around the house.

Q: Mother was home much of the time when you were growing up?

SMYTHE: All of the time when we were growing up. To earn extra money, she did sewing, but people had to come to the house for fittings. She didn't go out to other places.

Oh, and she was an interesting person with the help. I remember once she employed a woman who lived in the neighborhood and discovered that the woman couldn't read and write. I remember Mother's sitting around the dining room table with Mrs. Watson, teaching her how to write her name. She felt that everyone should be able to do this, and Mother had been a teacher before she married, so she sat down and started that woman off, even though Mrs. Watson was already perhaps sixty years old.

Someone said to her, "There's a nice girl who's come in from the country, and she wants to make her fortune in the city. She's working at a restaurant across the street, but I don't think she ought to be there because there are men patrons. She's only sixteen, and they can make remarks and it isn't good for a girl to be in that position." So she said, "Do you have a place for her? Could you take a live-in maid?" And Mother said, "Send her over. Let me talk to her." And Cordelia came to live with us.

She was a little older than my oldest sister, nine months older than my oldest sister, and Cordelia is still a member of the family. Cordelia had dropped out of school. Mother started her straight away to night school to take classes, and Cordelia, with a little encouragement, got interested in education and she stayed in school until she got her master's degree, and went to work teaching in the Atlanta school system and was eventually voted Teacher of the Year. She was one of the first black teachers to be placed in the high school where the superintendent of schools sent his son. It was a marvelous kind of thing. She married a faculty member from one of the colleges, and they have a nice home, and we keep up with her. She joined us in August to go to El Paso to visit my eldest sister, so she is still very much in the family.

Q: Wasn't that wonderful that your mother did that so she could utilize her own ability. Otherwise, it would have been wasted; she never would have known what she had.

SMYTHE: That's right. My grandmother used to take girls. There was an orphanage for girls in Atlanta. (The building is now part of Spelman College, but when we were very small kids, we used to go over there and have Sunday School with the orphans sometimes, or we'd visit them and play on their playground and so on, and some of them went to the same school we attended.) Mother told her mother about the place, and so when the girls got to be sixteen or eighteen and had to go out and find a job, Grandmother would sometimes take one. And so she took Gertrude, years ago. I forget Gertrude's last name-it was Hill-but Gertrude stayed with Grandmother for years. Then she went to work in Pennsylvania, and Grandmother hired Margaret. Margaret stayed, and each one was helped to better herself and go out into the world. And Mother's sister did the same thing. She hung on to the human relationships.

Q: With this early example of benevolence all around you, it must have been that you knew we're here to help other people.

SMYTHE: That's right.

Q: Was church a big part of your life?

SMYTHE: Yes and no. My father was a devout churchgoer, Grandmother was, my grandfather wasn't. My mother went to church pretty devoutly when we were little, but I remember later it was Dad who went to church and Mother didn't always go. Then later on, after we were grown up, she returned to the church and she and Dad went together to services every Sunday. It was important and respected, but it wasn't a central focus. School was really the central focus. We were always in private schools. I never went to a public school, never really taught in a public school.

Q: Were these girls' schools, or were they coed?

SMYTHE: Except for Spelman and Mount Holyoke, they were coed. Many of the black colleges had preparatory schools when we were little, and Oglethorpe Elementary School was connected with Atlanta University when I was little. They abandoned it about the time that I went to high school, but I went through it first.

Q: And your high school was a coed high school?

SMYTHE: My first year was Spelman High School. It was not coed. At the end of the first year, it became Atlanta University Laboratory High School, and coed. So I graduated from a coed high school.

Q: And then had four years at Mount Holyoke?

SMYTHE: No. I had three years at Spelman and only my senior year at Mount Holyoke. I wanted to do Spelman's four years in three, because I took extra courses and it was theoretically possible. I had practically completed my degree in three years, but the president, who was a graduate of Mount Holyoke, by the way, was reluctant to have me get my degree in less than four years. Dad had always wanted me to go to Mount Holyoke or Wellesley or Radcliffe, and so I sent out letters to these colleges to see whether they'd be interested in admitting me. I got responses from two of them saying they would, and they wanted me to enter as a junior. I said, "I've already done all this work and don't really need but one more year of college, at most." Mount Holyoke agreed to gamble on me because I had a good SAT score and college boards, so I did it all in one year.

Q: So you went to Mount Holyoke and got your degree from Mount Holyoke. What was your major?

SMYTHE: My major was economics and sociology. I started out, inspired by a student of my father's from Oklahoma who had come to Atlanta and become the first black CPA. I was very good in mathematics and I thought, "Boy, that must be a good thing to be." I didn't want to do something ordinary, like teaching or social work, so I thought I'd be a certified public accountant. When I got to Mount Holyoke, they didn't have accounting, and economics seemed to be closest to it. So I took economics and got interested in it and went on through, and my graduate work was in economics, with a legal angle to it. I took a Ph.D. minor in the law school when I got to Wisconsin.

Q: Before we go on to Wisconsin, let me just go back over your earlier years. Being the third of four children sort of puts you as the middle of a sandwich. After two older sisters, that's quite a heavy load to carry, I would think. Were you close in age?

SMYTHE: Sort of. My next sister and I were only nineteen months apart. She and the oldest were more than two years apart, and then there's a nine-year gap before my brother came, so I was really the little one until I was nine.

Q: Did you feel that you had to live up to high-achieving sisters?

SMYTHE: We were so different. My eldest sister was the artistic one. She was the most talented in piano; she was the one who did oil painting and modern dance. (All of us have a creative streak.) The second sister tended toward journalism. She wasn't bad in music, either, but she is the most gregarious of the lot, and she accused me of always following her around, not letting her have enough independence. I was the scholar of the lot. I was the one who did the best in school. All of us did all right, but I went beyond "all right," so that gave me a niche of my own. My brother was so much later that he was, in a sense, in a non-competing group. He just had three extra parents. [Laughter] I wasn't too much inclined to be a parent, but my next sister was.

Q: He was the baby.

SMYTHE: Yes.

Q: I can imagine how spoiled he was. [Laughter]

SMYTHE: Oh, indeed.

Q: A little boy after three daughters.

SMYTHE: He sort of liked the fact that I was smaller than the others, so he felt I was a little nearer to him in that way.

Q: Have you remained close with your siblings, or have you all just gone your own ways, so that you don't have time?

SMYTHE: Yes and no. We all keep in touch, and Sarah, my nearest sister, is never going to get too far away. She insists on worrying about everybody.

Q: She's the little mother?

SMYTHE: She's the little mother. She was the most motherly with Harry and so on. Mother was very conscious of the importance of family unity and loved her family, loved contacts with relatives. She always made sure she went back to visit our grandparents. So we grew up in a family that respected family ties.

Q: Did you have grandparents living near?

SMYTHE: Yes. Not living in the family, no.

Q: No, but living near, in the same city?

SMYTHE: No. We never lived in the city with anybody else. It was only after I left Atlanta that my first cousin came to Atlanta to practice medicine and became very close to my mother and always looked out for her, and so on, when we were away. But all of us scattered. My brother is in New York, I have a sister in Texas, and a sister in Chicago, so we're in different places, but we keep in touch.

Q: You said you did have grandparents. Did you visit them in the summer or vacations?

SMYTHE: In the summer. I visited them more than the other children, I think, because I enjoyed doing it so much.

Q: Did anybody in your family live on a farm so you had that experience as a child?

SMYTHE: No, but my grandfather owned a farm. Tenants ran it, but I went out and I had my picture taken on the farm. I don't really know farm life firsthand.

Q: You were a city girl.

SMYTHE: Yes. And they lived in town. Granddad had a grocery store, and one of his main customers, very influential customer, was the father of Bernard Baruch. Baruch, of course, grew up to know the family, and someone told me that Baruch's father was the doctor that delivered my mother. I haven't verified that.

Q: It makes a nice story, doesn't it?

SMYTHE: It makes a great story. I don't know how these things happen in a segregated society like South Carolina, but Granddaddy owned the property at the intersection of the two main streets in town, in Camden, and his name was up on one of the buildings at the junction. He believed that the best way to get ahead in life was to invest in real estate, so he did. At the time that he died, he left quite a bit of real estate on the main shopping street, and he was landlord to both Postal Telegraph and Western Union, and to the Candy Kitchen and the drugstore and so on.

Q: He picked the spot, didn't he?

SMYTHE: Yes. His own store was downtown, where influential customers would come, and he carried fine groceries. He would have kippered herring, for example, and imported Crosse and Blackwell things from England.. So he had a clientele that was made up of winter resort people in South Carolina and, like other members of the family, he looked out for other people. He had a sister who was ailing and she had children, so he took her son to grow up with his own children, and Mother felt very close to that son, that cousin. He started a grocery store in Orangeburg, which was a branch of the original Dibble Grocery Store.

Q: Did you ever get to play in the grocery store?

SMYTHE: Oh, all the time.

Q: Did you sample the goodies?

SMYTHE: Oh, yes. Penny candy all the time, and it came with prizes in it.

Q: Did it really? [Laughter] It must have been wonderful having a real old-fashioned grocery store where you wait on the customers instead of this self-service stuff. They always smelled so good, didn't they, grocery stores?

SMYTHE: You know, to this day the smell of that grocery store comes back to me when I go into a similar one.

Q: So you have very warm memories of your childhood and visiting them.

SMYTHE: Yes, very much so. He had a horse named Black Beauty, and he was still driving a horse and buggy when I was a little girl. He had a man who worked for him and who drove the horse, named Luther. I don't know what happened to Luther, but I remember I always wanted to sit on the front seat by Luther so I could watch the horse.

Q: Perhaps he was the delivery man? Did he deliver groceries?

SMYTHE: Yes.

Q: It was nice, wasn't it, those days? And the ice man would come around, and the meat man would come around.

SMYTHE: Yes. Things were so much simpler. And the milk was delivered, and at various times, there were bakery deliveries. Every afternoon, we took our baths around three o'clock and put on fresh afternoon dresses and that time we put on socks. We wore shoes without socks in the morning, and we put on our socks in the afternoon. Granddaddy very solemnly gave each of us a nickel to go downtown and buy an ice cream cone, which was approved, and if we felt a little naughty, we would buy a hot dog. We felt that was really very racy.

Q: Because Mama was very careful with your diet otherwise, I suppose.

SMYTHE: We explained to the drugstore man that we had a nickel, and only a nickel, and if he would make them small enough, couldn't he make an ice cream soda for a nickel? [Laughter] And he did! We took to negotiating at an early age.

Q: Did you do that or did your older sisters do that? Do you remember?

SMYTHE: I suppose they may have carried the ball, but a lot of times I was visiting alone. Only one of us would go at a time. It seemed an imposition to have more going unless Mother was there to look after us.

Q: It's nice, too, for you to have private time with them.

SMYTHE: Yes, and I remember the first time I spent the summer: August came and I heard Grandmother say, "Isn't that funny? Mabel's only six and she hasn't once asked about home and the family."

It occurred to me that I was being disloyal, and so the next morning when I got up I said, "Where is my Mommy? I want to see my Mommy." Even in those days, I was a diplomat. [Hearty laughter]

Q: A little psychology there. Isn't that sweet? But you were having a good time.

SMYTHE: I enjoyed it. I felt perfectly comfortable, and because Mother felt so close to her family, I felt it was just an extension of ours, and the fact that we didn't have everybody there didn't worry me as long as we had family.

Q: And perhaps Mother's mother is a very close thing, anyway.

SMYTHE: Yes. She was a very interesting woman, because she was strict, didn't like kids hanging around her kitchen. She was not one to teach them to wash the dishes. In the first place, she had a girl who did that, but she didn't want them cluttering up the kitchen and putting their dirty paws on things that ought to be kept clean, so we didn't get a great deal of training in that sort of thing. Mother had a sister who never married, who was quite a disciplinarian. She was a teacher and took very seriously her role in as responsible person, and so she brought us up to conform and behave ourselves.

Q: Did anybody teach you to cook? Did Mother, perhaps, later?

SMYTHE: Yes. I'm not quite sure how it all worked out, but we took turns getting breakfast in the morning. But when I was thirteen, I turned over a pot of hot coffee and it fell on my pajamas and it clung to my leg and I got burned, and Mother was scared to death. We all learned how to do basic cooking, and somehow on the weekends we made cakes and pies and hot rolls and all of us learned how to do very ambitious baking. Dad would take over if we had a leg of lamb. He liked to bury the garlic in the lamb and do it just right, and if we had lamb chops, he liked to broil those. Saturday night was a night for celebrating, so on his way home from the office he would stop in town and pick up Planters peanuts, great big bagfuls, and dime store candy of some kind. He'd keep in mind who liked what, and so everybody would have something. There would be enough variety so you could find what you liked to have. We would have an eating good time, and there wouldn't be very much left by Sunday morning.

Q: Was this every Saturday?

SMYTHE: Every Saturday. Oh, yes. Depression-no matter what. Prosperity or depression.

Q: Did you have things like Girl Scouts or Brownies?

SMYTHE: Those things were just getting started. The Boy Scouts got started while my brother was growing up, and he was a Boy Scout. I remember reading about the Camp Fire Girls and I remember going to camp with Mother, who was helping the YWCA organize a camp so that kids could have the camp experience. It wasn't a Girl Scout thing. I went along. I was already a teenager, so I was sort of like a camp counselor.

I remember doing that once and doing it again in South Carolina with my aunt. What they did was use the college dormitories in South Carolina State College and have a special camp for girls, and we had a sort of camping experience.

Q: What was it, a weekend or that sort of thing?

SMYTHE: Something like that. I think Mother's was a week, so there was time enough to do things.

Q: Sure, like tie knots. I don't know why they always taught us to tie knots. [Laughter] Who did you play with? Your family, or did you have a lot of friends from school?

SMYTHE: People in the neighborhood. School kids were a long way off, sometimes, because they'd come from all over Atlanta to this private school, so I played most with kids on the block. Mother used to say, somewhat ruefully, that she couldn't tell quite what kinds of kids I'd be dragging home, because I didn't seem to have my eye out for elegance at all. But I was an avid skater. Roller-skating. Not a graceful one, heavens no, but avid. I tried to go as fast and as far as anybody.

Q: Did you play with boys as well as girls?

SMYTHE: Not much.

Q: You didn't play Kick the Can and baseball and all that?

SMYTHE: No, and I never was able to hit a baseball as a result. That bat was too little. I sometimes call myself a sports illiterate now. I never learned how to watch a baseball game, really. My husband sort of explained it to me, and when I got my master's degree in absentia, I was actually sitting in the White Sox ball park, seeing my first big league game.

Q: But it didn't take?

SMYTHE: It didn't take.

Q: Any tennis?

SMYTHE: I played a little tennis when I was in college, not much, didn't even know how to be instructed in it, and it never caught hold. I once came in third in a swimming race, which impressed everybody until they found there were only three in the race. [Hearty laughter] We learned when I was thirteen. We went to the Y to take swimming lessons, and I learned how to swim, not terribly well. I never learned how to fit the breathing to the crawl. I can still float, but I'm not a very good swimmer.

I found it much easier to do something outlandish. For instance, when my first husband and I were teaching in Tennessee, in Nashville, there were a few instructors left over from the war who wanted to teach flying, and so there was a flying program. Not enough students were signing up for flying, so my husband and I said we'd take lessons, and we started and took the whole series, and I soloed; both of us did.

Q: And you weren't afraid?

SMYTHE: Oh, not a bit. I loved it. As a matter of fact, I had always been carsick and airsick, and the third time up was the end of my being automatically sick in a plane. Now, I still have some queasiness if my transportation is wobbly. But I continued to fly every chance I got. If I had a long layover at an airport and they were giving plane rides, I'd take a plane ride, provided they'd let me handle the controls, and a lot of people would.

When I got to Cameroon, I would have to charter a plane to go and see our AID projects, and I got to the point where the pilot who was taking me around would get used to me and let me handle the plane. The last time I came in off one of those charter flights, I landed at Yaoundi ½ Airport, because he finally got to the point where he said, "You can take off and land."

But I was never sufficiently avid to worry about it when it wasn't convenient to go fly. It was fun.

Q: That's fantastic. Were you a delicate child?

SMYTHE: Never. I was a tomboy.

Q: You were a tomboy. Is that right? And yet you played with little girls.

SMYTHE: That's right. But not in ladylike fashion. I would climb the trees. We had a fig tree, and the week before my wedding, I remember my father found me climbing the fig tree.

Q: So you like physical activity?

SMYTHE: Yes. And I stay in reasonably good shape. I don't mean in athletic condition to do anything, but I can walk a long way. When I go to a place like London or Paris, if I don't have a schedule, I walk a lot. I learned how to walk all over those cities because a lot of the area I would be interested in was small enough so that you could get around well and you could see so much more.

Q: From what you say, you weren't competitive with your sisters, because, fortunately, you were all so different. Were you competitive at school, or were you competing with yourself?

SMYTHE: I suppose. There was competition there, but-

Q: Did you have a best friend?

SMYTHE: Yes, and always my closest friends were pretty good students, too, and involved in things. But I was involved in some cover-ups. When I went to visit my aunt in South Carolina, there was a child my age that I had known and who was the nearest playmate, and my aunt would say, "Don't tell her what grade you're in, because she's only third grade," and I was fifth, something like that, so that I soft-pedaled talk of academic achievement. It wasn't the way to be popular, and I found that out, so we didn't talk about that.

Q: Academic achievement was not . . .

SMYTHE: It was great for grownups, and parents would be interested, but not casual friends. My school buddies were all in the top quarter of the class.

Q: Did you jump any grades?

SMYTHE: Yes. When I was three, my sister next to me went to first grade, and so I would go to visit, and then we sort of parlayed that into my being in part of the kindergarten. Mother talked them into taking me. And then when I was four, we moved to Atlanta. I was big for my age at that point, and they enrolled me in first grade. Mother told them I had been in kindergarten, so they put me in first grade. Mother said, "They didn't really catch onto the fact that you were only four until you were already there."

Q: And you could do the work. You must have been an early reader.

SMYTHE: Yes.

Q: Picked up from your sisters, or did Mama sit down and work with you?

SMYTHE: No, she never did do homework with me. I'd have felt insulted if I had to be helped. I picked it up from toys and things. I remember one of my toys was a map of the United States, and I learned all the states easily that way. My father was interested in the reading and writing. I remember when I was in the first grade I wanted to write a book, so I took a piece of paper and cut and folded it up until it had about eight pages, I guess, and wrote a story on it and showed it to Dad.

Dad was a stickler for good grammar and spelling and so on. I was a natural speller, so I used to win spelling contests without any problem, but he taught me to reread my letters and make sure it said what I intended to say, and I was astonished at the fact I might leave a word out or leave a letter out or something. So by the time I got into real honest-to-goodness grammar study in school, he had already put me up to most of the grammatical principles, so I went through it without any problems at all. And I tended to have an analytic mind, which is good for grammar, not necessarily for artistic expression. But I decided I wanted to be a writer very young. I think my daughter is a third-generation frustrated writer, because my father was one.

Q: I suppose he did write some?

SMYTHE: Yes. And he did a newspaper column for a long time.

Q: Were you, perhaps, closer to him than your sisters were?

SMYTHE: Yes.

Q: Because you had these interests.

SMYTHE: I was a daddy's girl. I used to watch him shave and look up adoringly and pat his arm.

Q: Which must have been wonderful for him.

SMYTHE: Oh, he adored it. He had wanted one of us to go to the Seven Sisters, and I was the one who took him up on it. And he was a graduate of Wisconsin, and I went to Wisconsin for graduate work.

Q: So you identified with your father?

SMYTHE: I identified with him.

Q: I gather both of your parents were very kindly warm people. You weren't afraid of either one of them?

SMYTHE: No.

Q: Mother was, perhaps, a bit strict, but then she had to be.

SMYTHE: Mother was sentimental. One could maneuver Mother on many things.

Q: And, of course, you were the baby for a long, long time, so you were in a pretty choice position.

SMYTHE: I was in a pretty good position.

Q: Isn't it interesting what a difference it makes that your brother wasn't born earlier?

SMYTHE: Yes. And my father was much less tolerant of my oldest sister than he was of me. I was always eager to please. She had red hair and a temper to match.

Q: Sure. Well, he'd been worn down by then. [Laughter]

SMYTHE: And Sarah, the middle one, sort of made her way. She was busy with her contemporaries and most successful at contemporaries, in a way.

Q: You said she was very gregarious. You have mentioned your sisters and their music lessons. Did you also have music lessons?

SMYTHE: Yes. We all did.

Q: Piano?

SMYTHE: We all had piano, and Sarah and I took violin lessons.

Q: Oh, you had violin, too.

SMYTHE: And I decided I wanted to blow a horn, so later on I picked up the cornet in school and did a little in the school orchestra. Doris, the eldest, belatedly took up the violin; she was by far the best pianist in the family. Years later, she was organist for her church in Philadelphia.

Q: So school orchestra was an activity.

SMYTHE: Yes. And the glee club. I was a second alto, with a deep voice. They used to tease me about my low voice.

Q: You've mentioned you wanted to be a writer. Did you work on the school paper?

SMYTHE: When I was fifteen, I was the editor of the high school paper and a reporter before that.

Q: Did you graduate at fifteen?

SMYTHE: Yes. That was one reason Wellesley wasn't so anxious for me to finish up in a year, because I was eighteen when I started my senior year. But it worked out all right at Mount Holyoke, because I had done a lot of work ahead of time. I taught for two years after I graduated. After first teaching year, I went to summer school at the University of Wisconsin.

The summer I graduated from college, my aunt had a sickly new baby and three older children (she ended up with five in all), and I went down to help her while her household help had summer vacations, and so I sort of ran the household for her and rather enjoyed it. The next summer, I went off to start a master's degree at Wisconsin, but when I came back I became engaged to my first husband, and so the next year I was getting married. I was twenty-one before the wedding.

I taught for two years in between graduating and getting married. Hugh had a fellowship to study at Northwestern, so I did my master's degree at Northwestern instead of Wisconsin and then went back to Wisconsin and picked up the rest of it, and put in two years and got the Ph.D. while my husband went into the Army and then returned to do his dissertation research. I was always in a hurry. I didn't want to take more than minimum time for things.

Q: You enjoyed school, obviously, and enjoyed reading. Can you remember any books you liked as a child?

SMYTHE: Oh, yes. Little Women, that was one of my favorites. I read all the series, The Bobbsey Twins. Oh, the Bobbsey twins and Elsie Dinsmore, these old books that were left over from Mother's day and even earlier. And there was Anne of Green Gables and The Five Little Peppers and How They Grew. I used to read avidly. And Dad introduced me to de Maupassant by reading Patient Griselda and The Necklace aloud to us, after which I took the book and read it all.

Q: When you climbed your fig tree, did you take a book up with you? [Laughter]

SMYTHE: Let me tell you, I've been known to do things as ridiculous as that. And I always enjoyed South Carolina for that reason; there was no child but me in the house. I would even practice the piano, but I would read more. I became hooked on Jane Austen, and Jane Austen is still a favorite author of mine.

Q: It sounds as though you had a wonderful life growing-up. Were you very aware of segregation when you were growing up?

SMYTHE: Not as much as I might have been. I was very, very aware because there were some horrendous things happening around us, and yet it was possible to protect us from the worst of it, because we lived in a vast black community, so complete that we didn't see outside it much and we didn't come in contact with the element that would be most difficult. The people we came in contact with would be the salespeople at the department stores and that sort of thing, when we went downtown, but not very much. We just weren't where we'd come across working-class whites, who would most resent competition from blacks. We had both white and African American teachers in school.

Q: Was it mentioned much at home?

SMYTHE: Yes, all the time. We had the black newspapers which headlined all of the lynchings, and there were many more than one might imagine, even in those years. I remember once when there was an argument on a streetcar in our neighborhood. The streetcar passed down the street and stopped in front of our house.

The streetcar conductor apparently was impatient with the persistence of a passenger who was questioning him or objecting to something, and he hit the woman passenger over the head with his flashlight. He was out in a black community, surrounded by blacks, nobody else on the streetcar, and everybody got off that streetcar and took off the connection that powered the car. You could disconnect the power easily-and that poor man was running from one end of the streetcar to another, hiding under seats. They broke every window in that car, I think, and let him know in no uncertain terms that he could not get away with that.

Q: He was lucky they didn't beat him up.

SMYTHE: Yes. Blacks were not bloodthirsty to the extent of actually killing somebody. They could easily have killed him. But it was so outrageous to take a woman, who was asking him something, and hit her across the head, that they had just had enough. But regardless of the merits of their position, the penalties were tremendous.

I had a very close relationship. You asked me about my best friend. Well, during the summer vacation, my best friend and her older brother-this was after the ninth-grade year, I think. I was twelve and she was thirteen, I think. She went to the playground after church with her brother. They were the children of the minister, not our minister, but another minister, and lived some distance away. I never saw where she lived, actually, at that time. Her brother, who was a senior at Morehouse College, took their little brother to the swings and began swinging him back and forth, and she was standing there. Some white men came in and said, "That's the nigger." They believed that he was the one who had said something to one of the whites, and they murdered him. They shot him in front of his little sister and brother, without waiting to find out whether he was the one or what, and he had been in church at the time that the incident happened.

But it was so outrageous and they had been so careless of establishing his identity or anything and he was clearly not guilty, for the first time in the history of Georgia they were sentenced to prison for murdering a black person. The first time in history. Now, they were given only two or three years for it, but it was such an astonishing change from what had been customary. Now, it's this kind of thing. You could live in a protected environment, know nothing about what was going on, and suddenly this comes practically into your living room; someone you knew.

There was a family that had very tall people in it, and they were all given to education. They were a middle-class family and everyone worked earnestly to get ahead and the children were all decent citizens and whatnot, and they were looking for a black who had been accused of something-usually they'd accuse them of rape-and they described the person as a short, dark-skinned person. Here was this great gangling, tall, light-skinned person, and somebody said, "That's the one," and so they revised their description and killed him. They did not go to prison. That was before the other case. Mother was shaken by this because she had known the whole family. She'd been to school with some of them, and they were a very fine family.

So we knew of the possibilities and what was happening and we could read in the newspapers when there was a lynching and how-they did horrendous, incredible things. You think that the Nazis were pretty bad, but things like-I remember when I was maybe eleven or twelve reading the newspaper story about how they cut off one victim's toes and forced him to eat them, that kind of thing. Just incredibly uncivilized things. So it touched us very much, and we learned how to sweep that aside and live our lives as if it didn't go on all the time.

Q: Did it affect you when it came to religion? Did you wonder how a god could permit this sort of thing to go on?

SMYTHE: By the time I was old enough to think very philosophically, I was not very religious. It seemed to me that the way that was paying off best was the NAACP court case method, and so we all supported the NAACP and had great hope for it. I actually worked on the school segregation cases. My husband and I had spent two years in Japan, and on our way home, when we got to Paris, there was an invitation for me to work on the school cases. So I knew when I landed in New York that that's what I would be doing during that summer. It was a fascinating experience.

Q: How much did the war impact on you?

SMYTHE: Not as much as if I had had a brother a little older. Now, Harry actually got as far as signing up for the V-12 program in the Navy, but he never actually saw any service. My uncles were too old and so was my father. I had one uncle who was medical director of a veterans hospital and was made a brigadier general, but I think in the reserve, so he was technically participating in the war as a medical person, but he never left the VA where he was already employed. So we were spared immediate concern.

Q: Not having people in it, it didn't impact much on you. You didn't think about it.

SMYTHE: Well, you know, I was teaching in Missouri at Lincoln University, and to go anywhere, you had to get on overcrowded trains, take a good stiff suitcase so you could sit on it if you didn't have a seat. So, yes, there were impacts, and we were buying war bonds and that sort of thing. We bought a bond every payday.

Q: You didn't do any Red Cross rolling-bandages-type thing?

SMYTHE: I didn't have time. I was working all the time. Let's see. I did little things like-I wasn't actually a warden.

Q: Oh, yes, airplane spotter.

SMYTHE: Yes. I remember being taught how to read maps.

Five years after V-J Day, in 1951, we went to Japan to teach for two years in Japanese universities.

Q: What about your husband? He wasn't in the service at all?

SMYTHE: Yes. Now, he had some very interesting contacts with the Army. He was in graduate school at Northwestern and signed up for the draft, and someone said, "Instead of getting drafted as a foot soldier, why don't you volunteer for officer candidate school?" So he did. But there was at that time-this was 1941, I guess-he signed up for OCS and they were very reluctant to give him a chance to become an officer, and so he was sent from one place to another. He went in somewhere near Chicago and got sent to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and from there to Fort Hood, Texas, and put in the tank destroyers corps that was a particularly hardy kind of place. One man said, "I see you have a whole lot of education. Well, it isn't going to do you a damn bit of good in here." They didn't want him to go into OCS. They didn't know what to do with a highly educated black person, and he was a Ph.D. candidate at that time, so they ended up discharging him and saying, "We'll call you later when we need you." So he went back to graduate school and wasn't called again.

Q: I never knew that ever happened.

SMYTHE: Yes. I remember going to see William Hastie, a black civilian, I think, assigned to the Department of War, at that time it was (Defense came later), who was supposed to keep in touch with the business of black soldiers and how they fared and so on. I went to Washington to see him to tell him what was happening and how Hugh was not getting the training he was entitled to-wasn't asking to get out; just asking to be trained and get on with it. So I think it was through his offices that they were told that they should either train him or release him.

Q: Did it make your husband very angry?

SMYTHE: He was one who was going to be a real spit-and-polish officer, very responsible, and he was disappointed. Later on he realized he had been very fortunate not to be exposed to the danger. But he was very annoyed with all sorts of discrimination and he fought against it.

Q: It seems to me what would be the most difficult thing of all would be to see people vastly inferior to yourselves having the right to tell you what to do.

SMYTHE: Absolutely. One of my high-school teachers had a Ph.D. from Harvard, and was a Phi Beta Kappa, and he went into the Army as a private and was given grave-digging detail. He was slight of stature. He had been a very intellectual sort of person. And the sad thing was, many black soldiers were still in the stage where they would say, "This will be an opportunity to show people how loyal we are and how we deserve to be given equality." There was a great deal of suppressed anger, and it created great difficulty for many people.

Now, interestingly enough, there were no men to go out of our family, but my sister, the middle one, joined the WACS. She was in the first officers group of the Women's Army Corps, and they did not give her difficulty. She went on and became an officer. She came out a major. She was trained in Iowa, went to Camp Attlebury, Indiana, and then to Fort Knox, Kentucky, and was mustered out from there.

Q: Why do you suppose that was, that she didn't have any trouble? They let her train.

SMYTHE: Because they were doing a women's thing. I suppose because to start something like this and to get your first group of women-it was done late enough, maybe, so that they already realized there was great pressure for having black as well as white. They had a black company leader and she was in it.

Q: The entire company was black?

SMYTHE: At that time, they hadn't integrated. They didn't integrate the services until Eisenhower.

Q: That's right. I remember that. There was a black outfit of men, too. They fought in Italy.

SMYTHE: Yes.

Q: Did they have black officers?

SMYTHE: Yes.

Q: But they didn't put your husband with that group? They were quite illustrious, I remember.

SMYTHE: Well, it may be that somebody deliberately sent him to a place where they didn't have a company of men. He wrote to me that he was in a company that had the lowest educational level and the highest VD rate in the entire camp. He said he was afraid to go to the toilet.

Q: This was a mixed group?

SMYTHE: No. No mixed groups existed at that time.

Q: Not even in training?

SMYTHE: Not even in training.

Q: And they put him in with the lowest common denominator?

SMYTHE: That was, I think, deliberate. They were annoyed at being importuned by a person who they saw as needing to do what he was told and shut up and not ask for opportunities. It was a pretty bitter chapter for him. I was, of course, grateful that he wasn't exposed to more fighting, and through no fault of his own.

Q: But at a time like that a man wants to prove his manhood. That's very important.

SMYTHE: That's right. And he saw this as a logical opportunity to do some of the things that had been denied in ordinary civilian life. There were changes that were made under the pressure of war.

Q: Don't you think it's because of World War II that all this nonsense did start to stop?

SMYTHE: I think it did. You see, first of all, opening up the Air Force was a big thing that happened, and there was a black Air Force base that did train flyers. So a lot of things started and eventually worked out, and now I think we have to admit that, in spite of its faults, the armed services accomplished more, because of the nature of discipline in the armed services, than many of the civilian entities. There was not so much discussion.

Second Interview June 10, 1986

Q: For the record, I wonder if you'd give me your parents' names. We never did get down their names.

SMYTHE: My father was Harry Saunders Murphy, and Mother's maiden name was Josephine Dibble. Both of them were born in South Carolina, in Camden, and Dad remembered seeing Mother as a little girl. When he was, I suppose, about to be a teenager, he went to Boston and lived there for a while and didn't return to South Carolina to live.

I'm not quite clear on how he and Mother met as young adults, because after he completed English High School in Boston, he went to Hampton Institute, now Hampton University. When Mother was graduated from Atlanta University, she went to work for the Census of 1910. She graduated in 1909 and came to Washington, thought Washington was a beautiful city and enjoyed it, and worked in the Census [Bureau].

Q: What did she do? Did she ever tell you what she did? Go around and take down people's history?

SMYTHE: I gather she did that, but I didn't ask her. At the time she told me about this, I was a little girl and not very curious. I don't think I ever went back and enlarged on it. I do know that she taught for a year or two at Miles Memorial. It was a college when I heard of it as a teenager, but at the time Mother went there it may well have been a secondary school. She said she had to threaten to sue to get all of her pay, because they were short of money and were not going to pay the teachers their full salary as promised. But she eventually got her money, and she eloped to Chicago, where she and Dad got married, and went to live in Madison, which she loved. She enjoyed it tremendously. There were a good many German-speaking people then, and she and Dad set about learning German. I remember when I started growing up, I took that old German book and started teaching myself a little German. I liked to do things that my father did. So I started off with German, and, do you know, I got far enough along so I never studied German formally before taking my Ph.D. language exams in French and German, and I passed.

Q: You're obviously gifted in languages.

SMYTHE: I don't know. I'll tell you, my gift was in grammar and structure. I had no special talent so far as an ear for language is concerned, but I could get the grammar down pat very quickly. Dad was a grammarian. I got it from him, I suppose.

Q: And you said you're a natural speller.

SMYTHE: Yes.

Q: Don't you think all of those talents seem to go together? It's a cluster.

SMYTHE: I think creativeness goes sort of across the board, too, and there was a creative streak in the family. When I look at all my brothers and sisters-I told you about my older sisters-all had a creative streak. All were interested in writing, for example, all four. My second sister worked as a newspaper reporter for a while. She also proposed to major in music. She changed later, but she was interested in music, and she was the one who played the violin in the college orchestra when she was nine years old. This was just a way of exposing her to orchestral music and giving her a sense of how it was put together. Later on, I joined her, but I was all of eleven before I got into the orchestra, so that was a late start.

Q: Did you win scholastic honors when you were going through school?

SMYTHE: Yes.

Q: Can you remember what some of those were? Were you valedictorian, for example?

SMYTHE: Yes and no. There was an argument about that. I gave the valedictory at my graduation, but the question was that the principal did not believe in individual honors. It was a progressive school, and there was a question as to who had the best record in the class, and I was satisfied with leaving it fuzzy. I think there were three of us who were at the top of the class. It was generally thought that I was at the very top, but the year of graduation, a girl who did four years in three joined our class and graduated with us, and there was a question as to whether she should stand first or I should, but we didn't have recognized honors to resolve the issue. I did win a prize for an essay on self-help when I was a junior in college.

Q: Who was sponsoring this?

SMYTHE: This was one of the prizes given each year at Spelman College.

Q: Can you remember what your essay was about?

SMYTHE: I have lost that entirely. Now, I remember the speech, the high school valedictory. It wasn't called a valedictory; it was just listed last on the program. It was "The Rest of the World and I"-the fact that we were now joining the mainstream. Full of clichés. We didn't have Phi Beta Kappa at Spelman, and I had only one year at Mount Holyoke. Even if I had been a brilliant student that one year, I think the rules were, you had to be in a full year before you were elected.

At Northwestern there was something. It was a social science society, Alpha Pi Zeta. And, of course, I was in the National Honor Society as a high school kid. I forgot about that. They instituted it my senior year in high school.

Q: You went to Northwestern-not immediately after you finished Mount Holyoke.

SMYTHE: No. My first summer out of school I took shorthand and typing and was not stellar at it, but I held down more than one job on the basis of being able to do something in shorthand and typing.

Q: Were you a class officer, Mabel?

SMYTHE: Oh, yes. I was never a president, but I was a vice president. I was the youngest child in the class in high school.

Q: By quite a bit, I should think.

SMYTHE: Well, no. There were two other students who were within six or eight months.

Q: Were you sixteen yet when you finished?

SMYTHE: I was fifteen two months before I graduated from high school, and I turned nineteen two months before graduating from Mount Holyoke. I wanted to graduate in three years, I think I told you last time, but there was such an objection and so much wishing to have me do differently that I transferred rather than bother with it, and got the sense of having done something extra. That was in college.

Q: Did you ever do any public speaking?

SMYTHE: I didn't start public speaking until-well, let me take that back. I started public speaking very early, actually. I remember making an extemporaneous speech when I was in Mount Holyoke about growing up black in the South and what it was like, and discovering that, if I kept the butterflies out of my stomach, I could do very well. So I started speaking early after I graduated and did a good deal of it. I started that when I finished my Ph.D. and went to teach at Lincoln University in Missouri. My first teaching job was when I was right out of college. That fall I was a high school teacher at Fort Valley N&I Institute, Normal and Industrial Institute, which is to say, a junior college with a high school, an agricultural department, and a home economics (day students) department and they had both boarding and day students. I taught a conglomeration of courses-geometry, ninth grade English, twelfth grade civics, and there must have been some other string to my bow. I don't remember. I had four or five classes. We were teaching all day long.

Q: What was your major as an undergraduate?

SMYTHE: I majored in economics and sociology-it was a joint major-but I took minors in English and mathematics.

Q: That's a strange combination, isn't it?

SMYTHE: Well, I considered doing a major in mathematics first, because I'd always been good at arithmetic as a kid and as a grown-up, but it would have been the wrong thing for me. I like being involved with people more. Science was not really my bag. My biology teacher tried to persuade me to major in science, and, do you know, at that point I thought, "I don't really want to go around dissecting cats. Who needs it?" And then I took psychology, and thought, "Boy, I'd love to major in that, and then I found out it would take me sixteen years to finish college and take the equivalent of a Ph.D. in psychology and a M.D. and whatnot before I became a psychiatrist. I said, "My goodness, that's the rest of my life. I'd be middle-aged!" It may have been just as well. So I ended up majoring in economics.

Q: You were nineteen years of age when you were a teacher in high school?

SMYTHE: Yes.

Q: And you were just thrown in? No practice teaching or anything?

SMYTHE: No. I remember the first time I chaperoned a group of girls. We had been to some event on campus, and I was told to take them back to the dormitory. So we were walking along, and the girl next to me said, "Say! They didn't send a teacher with us. They always send a teacher." And I said, "I'm a teacher." I taught several students who were older than I was that year. After those two years at Fort Valley I went back to graduate school, so I didn't work full-time again until I had an assistantship grading papers and that sort of thing, but I didn't work full-time. I married, spent a year at Northwestern doing my M.A., then two at Wisconsin finishing the Ph.D., and then went to teach at Lincoln University in Missouri and taught there for three years, and then in Nashville at Tennessee State for a year while my husband finished his military service and got his Ph.D. and went with me to Tennessee State.

Q: You went to Northwestern to get your master's. Was this in sociology?

SMYTHE: No. Economics. I was straight economics. I never took any more sociology, though I took some anthropology.

Q: Well, I thought you might have, because your husband's field was anthropology.

SMYTHE: Yes. I found it absolutely fascinating, so I attended seminars with him sometimes and actually signed up formally to audit one of the courses with Mel Herskovits, and that was a very interesting experience. I think I would have majored in anthropology had I known about it. It was fascinating.

Q: How did you happen to meet your husband?

SMYTHE: I met him in Atlanta. He was on the faculty at Fisk University at the time and doing some research, and he came to Atlanta. He had done his master's degree at Atlanta University and had met my family and friends then. In fact, he and my sister took a class with Dr. W.E.DuBois together.

Q: That must have been a treat.

SMYTHE: It was a fascinating experience, and DuBois became very much interested in him and he worked with DuBois for several years as his assistant.

He had taken one of my best friends to the dance where I met him; I went with a boy I knew. We met that time and he called me the next day for a date, and that started it all.

Q: So you knew him a good while, then, before you were married?

SMYTHE: A little over a year. I met him in June. I went off to Wisconsin for summer school. I came back in the fall, and he met me at the airport and he announced that he was going to marry me. Didn't ask. He said, "You know you're going to marry me." [Laughter] We were married the following July. We went to Northwestern together. He was with the Army part of the time I was doing the Ph.D. work.

Q: You told me last time about his experiences in the Army, or I should say his non-experiences in the Army, because they never wanted to make any use of his abilities.

SMYTHE: He was in the Army only a matter of months. I think it was less than a whole year, his whole experience. The shadow of being called up again was always over him, but it never happened, so he did get his doctorate done.

Q: His field was anthropology. What was his specialty?

SMYTHE: African studies.

Q: One thing I wanted to ask you about When you went up to Mount Holyoke, was that your first time going that far north? First time in New England?

SMYTHE: Yes.

Q: What struck you about New England?

SMYTHE: It was a funny thing. I felt I belonged there. I had a sense of belonging greater than I had had in many other situations, because most of the students seemed to have the same kind of goals and concerns that I did and the same kind of family background and so on. When I was growing up, very often I needed to be a little careful of what I said so as not to hurt anybody's feelings, or to stimulate comparisons and so on, and I got very good at it and at not appearing to be too bright or too intellectual or whatever.

Q: You were sensitive enough to know that.

SMYTHE: In the South, there was the Southern womanhood kind of symbol of not outdoing the men, and I could look as impressed by somebody's very modest intellect as anybody else's. But also, there was sensitivity from people who hadn't progressed as quickly or done as well in school, and I learned not to say too much about that. I had my share of lead roles in the plays. When we had one little play in high school, Little Red Riding Hood, we gave it in French when I was a first-year French student, and I was Red Riding Hood. When we had the operetta Hansel and Gretel, I was Hansel because I had a low voice and not a high one. (This was a girls' school. It was a coed school my second year, but that was my first year.) And I wasn't much of an athlete.

Q: You said you are a sports illiterate.

SMYTHE: Yes. So I was perfectly content to watch somebody else. We had a friend, who was a year ahead of me in school. Her sister was my classmate. She broke the high school high jumping record, the national record, and it was quite a thing to have an athlete. She never got anywhere near the Olympics, so far as I know, but we had that little flutter for a day or two. But I wasn't a competitor in any sports.

Q: Did you have sororities in your girls' schools?

SMYTHE: No, neither one.

Q: Some women learn leadership roles through sororities.

SMYTHE: Yes. We had girls' clubs, not connected with school, but the girls I grew up with who came from similar families and so on, had little clubs, and one of them-I can't remember what it meant-the DO-37. Maybe it was "Daughters of '37." Thirty-seven was the year we were due to graduate from college. It started out chiefly as a bridge club, but they grew up together and shared a lot of experiences together, and those who are still in Atlanta are still easily found.

Q: You still maintain those same friends?

SMYTHE: It's not the same club, though. I think our clubs came and went a little. I remember one year when Duke Ellington had a tune called "Sophisticated Lady," and for a while the club was called Sophisticated Ladies. I got disconnected a bit when I went to Mount Holyoke. I was out of town then, but my sister, Sarah, who was a classmate, retained her membership.

Q: Now, let's see: The war is over, your husband's back with you (he was back before the end of the war), he has his Ph.D., and you have your Ph.D. Where did you go next?

SMYTHE: We went to Tennessee State College. I worked at Lincoln University for three years, and at the end of that time, Hugh had his doctorate and we both went to Tennessee State. That was quite an experience. It was an attempt at providing separate education that would keep people quiet and keep them from contending that they ought to be in white universities. As a result, there were political influences on the campus. A white citizen who was running for sheriff came out to campus, sat in a prominent place to pass out his stickers and importune the teachers to vote for him and that sort of thing, and there was an inappropriate attempt to use the campus as a source of political influence to be mined.

People who were not qualified to write textbooks would write textbooks and get them adopted by the state school system, regardless of whether they should be used or not. It wasn't a dreadful example all the way across. There were people who were trying to provide a good educational experience for the students, but there was much too much of the parade of white politicians who made it known that if you wished to get money for the school budget, your only way was to ingratiate yourself with them. The president had to endure I don't know how much pressure to build up their egos in order to get the budget through. It was an eye-opening kind of experience.

Fort Valley ultimately became Fort Valley State College in Georgia, but at the time I taught there it was still an Episcopal school with a minister-in-residence, with no politicians coming to the campus or dealing with them, so I hadn't had this experience before. Lincoln University had been headed by a rather exceptional and dignified man. It was not the Deep South, it was a border state, and there wasn't this-or at least I didn't see-this kind of political pressure, so Tennessee State was a place where we were not terribly happy, and after a year we left.

Q: Tennessee State is a state university for black people?

SMYTHE: Yes. It was the state land grant institution for blacks. No integration whatever, no white faculty, no white students. The black institutions at that time also didn't have much in the way of foreign students. A few of them had an African student or two, but Africa was a long way off and it was an expensive journey so that there weren't many, and the ones that had them tended to have most of them. For instance, Lincoln University in Pennsylvania had a long string of persons who became influential African leaders. Nkrumah graduated from there as did a number of other [prominent Africans]. Morehouse College had a small group. We got to know them and felt comfortable with Africa as a result of sitting down around our dining room table and talking with people from Uganda or South Africa or wherever else. But there weren't a great many, so the experience was somewhat limiting.

In the state universities, there was a tendency for people to be able to get jobs through influence rather than just through academic credentials, and therefore there was much criticism of people who were not as effective as they should have been. Given the paucity of higher education opportunities, it was criminal to divert budgets to other than the best possible people.

Q: They were really exploited by white politicians.

SMYTHE: That's right. The person at the head was under pressure to deliver to the white politicians what they wanted, and would displace some of that pressure onto the staff, and this created an unhappy situation and was demeaning to the president in the eyes of his own staff.

Q: Did you both work?

SMYTHE: We were both on the faculty. It was our only experience teaching together in the same institution at the same time. We went to New York and decided we were simply going to stay out of the Deep South. We were also planning to have a family. Hugh went to work for the NAACP, and specifically for Dr. DuBois. He was research director for the NAACP. He knew Hugh's work because Hugh had worked with him in Atlanta. It didn't pay very well, but it was an interesting kind of assignment.

I had a miscellaneous bag of jobs. I did some freelance writing, mostly ghostwriting. Somebody had to give a speech about a book that David Lilienthal had just written; I wrote the speech. Somebody else had to do a piece for a trade paper on the use of forklift trucks, so I became an instant expert on forklift trucks. That kind of thing. I was asked to write a master's thesis, and I explained very patiently why it wasn't appropriate [laughter]. The person who felt that she was a very good friend of the family felt that I had insulted her by suggesting that this was not the honest thing to do.

Q: How would she have defended it if you had written it?

SMYTHE: I think people have blind spots where their interests lie. It was very funny, indeed. I even wrote some pulp stories for newspapers, and a few of those were published at the princely sum of \$15 apiece. But it does give you a sense of discipline and being able to work on things.

While Pam was little-she was born while I was doing these odd jobs-I had taken the job as an adjunct professor at Brooklyn College, teaching in the evening session, and I really enjoyed that because I had some students who were quite serious. One young man, in particular, was making a success as a young corporate semi-executive and he knew he'd be better off if he had a degree. It took him seven years, but he got his degree. He would pounce on everything, read it as if it were assigned, understand it if he had to stay after class and ask extra questions, so there were rewards to it and I really enjoyed that.

Q: What were your subjects there?

SMYTHE: Economics. I had a course in foreign trade, one in labor relations. I did this kind of thing off and on after I had gone back to full-time work elsewhere. When I was teaching at New Lincoln School, I took a job teaching two courses at night at the Baruch school in New York, and that was fascinating. It kept my hand in. When I became principal of the high school, I guess, I gave it up. I didn't want to give up all that I had worked to learn in economics, but I really did not wish to be an economist and stay in the field, particularly, and I was fascinated by education. So I stayed in it for fifteen years. I was at the New Lincoln School for fifteen years. After the first two, I was principal of the high school, first acting, and then fully committed to it, and I stayed in that position for ten years.

Q: Where is the New Lincoln School?

SMYTHE: It's in New York. It was associated with Columbia. The old Lincoln School was at Columbia University.

Q: Is that up near Columbia, right up 100-and-something?

SMYTHE: It was, but Columbia decided to discontinue the experimental school and to divert the endowment to educational research. The parents and the teachers of the old Lincoln School brought a court case to prevent it and lost the case. The building was converted into a public school building, and there's a public school near Columbia now, about 121st Street, that used to be the old Lincoln School, where the Rockefellers went to school.

Anyway, the same parents and teachers decided they were going to have a school, even if Columbia didn't want it. So they kept as many of the same people as possible and started a new school in what had been the YMCA, just across the street from Central Park on 110th Street, so that was the New Lincoln I knew. I came along when it had been going five or ten years, I guess, and was hired as a core teacher for the senior class. Then, after I'd been there for a year or two, the head of the school, who had been head of the high school and of the whole school, decided he wanted to give up the high school, do some college teaching himself at NYU, and so I became coordinator of the high school. Then he left and ultimately the three--there were three parts to the school--a lower school from nursery through the second grade; then the middle school from the third through the eighth; and the high school, four year high school, which was my part.

I enjoyed that school tremendously, learned a great deal, and I think, developed a good deal in the environment of a progressive school with a stellar group of teachers, many of whom were creative and interesting people in their own rights. I developed quite a bit there, the same way I did in graduate school, learning so much from working with creative people and didn't miss the university academic atmosphere because we had a great deal of diversity.

Q: How did you like this age group, which can be difficult?

SMYTHE: I had had ninth graders at Fort Valley who were really eighth graders. The state of Georgia decided to go from twelve years to eleven years, and they cut out the eighth grade. So the seventh graders entered the ninth grade with the eighth graders the year that I started teaching, and I found that that was, for me, the difficult age. Many people love the seventh and eighth graders. I didn't. I liked the ones who know what they are about, and so I enjoyed the older ones better.

Q: Did you find much difference between the maturity of the people in junior college, as opposed to the high school juniors and seniors?

SMYTHE: Somewhat, because I felt so much closer to them in the age group. My roommate was about a year and a half older than I was, so she was still pretty young. The two of us saw ourselves really as still very young when we started out and we identified more with the college-age group, which we had just left. We felt a bit surer of our authority when we were dealing with the younger students. Yet, I must say, the older students never challenged you. They were more mature, and I didn't have difficulty with them.

Q: You have mentioned Pam very briefly. Was she born when you were in New York?

SMYTHE: Yes, she was born in New York. We moved into Riverton, which was a new apartment development, in 1947, the year she was born. She was born in November, and we moved in, in July, I think. I loved our little apartment. It was tiny, but it was a two-bedroom apartment so she could have her room. We decorated it as a study to start with, with a sleep sofa in case we had guests. And then when she arrived four months later, we took the bookshelves-we had these things you put into the walls and put shelving on them. We had those things all over, even over the head of our bed, all four walls of the bedroom, but it gave us a place to put the books. We were doing a lot of book reviewing and adding to the collection and finding it very difficult to divest ourselves of any. Then Pam came along, and she was an absolutely winning child. She was a good-tempered baby who smiled at everybody, and she was a pretty little thing, so it was great fun taking her around and having everybody say, "Oh, isn't she adorable!" And she was our one and only.

I stayed at home. The year she was born I didn't do anything except ghost writing. I did a little ghost writing, and that kept my hand in and made me feel not totally out of everything.

Q: That first child is rather overwhelming, isn't it?

SMYTHE: Oh, I'll tell you. I remember the day I came home from the hospital. Hugh came up to get me, took me home, and rushed back to the office. When he came home that evening, I fell on his neck, tears streaming down. I would have been totally depressed. First of all, I was still weak. I had been in bed in the hospital all this time. I hadn't been particularly strong. I don't know whether I had lost blood or what, but one day I got up to go to the bathroom and on my way back I said to the nurse, "My goodness, it's getting dark in here." She grabbed me quickly; it was not dark. I was about to faint. She sat me down until I got myself together, and it took me a while to get to feeling strong and with it. This day, here I was dealing with diapers, scared I'd drop her.

The problem was that she didn't sleep, and for the first four months I lost eight pounds because she was always wide awake in the middle of the night, and I was afraid something would happen to her. The doctor said, "When she goes to sleep, no matter what you're doing, lie down and sleep." So I took to taking naps when she took naps and survived. One time he even gave her a prescription for the drops of paregoric that would quiet her because she was just so full of beans.

She had a big smile and she was not a crying baby, but there she was. And I was sure she'd smother if I wasn't watching her. I put loose covers around her. [Laughter] But we got past those four months and she was fine, and I just enjoyed her hugely. I loved diapering her and bathing her and whatever else.

Q: Did she prove to be as precocious as her mother?

SMYTHE: In a way, yes.

Q: Usually those wide-awake, alert babies are very bright.

SMYTHE: Her third grade teacher said, "She's good in everything. I thought maybe somebody else would have a chance at foot races, but she won those, too." And when the fourth grade teacher did a sociogram of the class, she said, "You know, most of the children want to sit by her. I asked them to write down the person they most like to sit next to, and her name showed up all over those lists." She is a delightful child, but she suffered from too much attention to Mommy sometimes. People would say, "Are you going to get a Ph.D. like your parents?" This is not what she most wanted to hear, and I was aware that the children did need to do their own thing.

She was drawing one day and she said, "Oh, it's no good."

I said, "For goodness sake, what do you expect? You're not a professional cartoonist."

She said, "You can draw a prettier picture than that."

I said, "It took a long time to learn how, too." But that stuck with her and was a handicap for her.

In spite of that, she had a lot of things going for her. She has the creative streak, too, that showed up in all sorts of ways. She was taking music lessons. I started her out with piano with a Julliard student I knew who took her up to Julliard to show how much her people had learned, and they wanted to know if her parents were professional musicians, because she cared about the perfection of tone. This was when she was eight, I suppose. At New Lincoln each year they had a five or six-week period when a child could take lessons on any instrument that she chose, and Pam chose, I think, the clarinet. Her teacher came to me and said, "Will you let her continue lessons? This child could do beautiful things."

I said, "I'd be glad to if she's motivated to do it, but I don't want her overburdened with things that I think she ought to do."

He said, "If it's a matter of money, she won't have to pay anything."

But she said, "No, I want to try the cello." [Telephone interruption]

When the cello teacher came up with the suggestion that she stick with that, she said, "Well, I think I'd like to do the violin." So she went along. She still does mainly the piano. I didn't want to pressure her unduly.

Q: In pursuing your own career, did you have mentors who were backing you?

SMYTHE: I didn't stick to one or two very much, except my father. He was my first one.

Q: And a very powerful one, I gather.

SMYTHE: Yes, I think so. He was the most long-standing one. Now, I had a mixed bag of others, and some of them were really very influential. My mother was influential in other ways. She's a natural leader, much more so than I am. She had a funny kind of understanding of a kid like me. It didn't work for all the kids, but she understood that I would sometimes not say what I really wanted, and she was a creative listener who found out what you meant underneath and encouraged. She never made a secret of her pleasure and her pride. No matter what small thing I had done, she always cared about it and celebrated it, and that gave me a great deal more confidence than I naturally had. I tended to be a shy little thing, but she made me feel that underneath I was very confident.

I had teachers who were pleased with me and who encouraged me. For instance, one of them was the director of the chorus at Spelman College. He would sometimes talk to me and ruminate over experiences he had had and so on, and he took an interest in my development. My original piano teacher was Mother. She started us off, but our first outside piano teacher was the chairman of the music department at the college. He taught us when we were very little.

I don't think of him nearly much as an influential person as I do this teacher who saw what I was. I had an English teacher when I was, I suppose, ninth or tenth grade, who later became a college faculty member and a friend. He and his wife were not too much older than we were, and he was interested in my intellect. I think he did his graduate work at Harvard and was a very interesting person. In high school exams, like the SAT, I would make very good scores. I was a good exam-taker. One year, when I was maybe thirteen or fourteen, I made a score that was higher than any that they had had at that school, and he got fascinated by this and kept introducing me to other things and insisting that I read this and that I try that, and so for a while he was sort of a mentor.

I had more than my share of decent teachers. When I was a freshman at Spelman, there was a required course in speech. I was fascinated with the international phonetic symbols, and the teacher who was teaching it was a Phi Beta Kappa who had a lot of intellectual interest, and it didn't bother her one bit when I said, "I think you made a mistake. Didn't you mean to use that other symbol for that word?" And she would look and see that she did, and she was secure enough so that she enjoyed this and encouraged me. So I got a lot out of courses like that.

Q: Well, as a teacher yourself, you know what a joy it is to have an eager little mind.

SMYTHE: As a teacher myself, I was concerned about keeping order in the class, and I didn't feel secure about commanding people. So I would zero in on the worst ones, the ones that I thought could really give me trouble, and make sure that I won them over to my side, and then I could manage the rest. Most people were not problems. When I left Fort Valley, someone told me that the girl who seemed to me most potentially destructive in my class had said, "Well, you have to say about Miss Murphy, she's always fair. She never plays favorites." I wanted to be sure that they didn't think that I would not give them a fair shake, because I had great sympathy for the underdog all the way through.

Q: Did you find you had any difficulties in New York because you were a woman, or was that a situation in a place where women were preferred, perhaps, in a private school? Certainly, it's one of the few jobs women could have in the 1940s. You became principal following a man, I believe. That's rather unusual, isn't it?

SMYTHE: I was not really very aware of discrimination against women at New Lincoln. For one thing, it was a progressive school, and part of the credo was "We develop everybody." For another, there were some tremendous role models there. [Telephone interruption]

I think I found mentors most places I went. I was trying to think of people in the State Department and around. Not so much there. There were one or two, I suppose, who were helpful. I learned a lot from my husband, who preceded me as an ambassador by a decade, and I have loads of friends in the Foreign Service who have been really good in helping me to understand a number of things through experiences they had.

Oh, we were talking about women. I went to New Lincoln in 1954 and stayed there until 1969, fifteen years later. During that period, we had the school segregation cases decision. The decision came before I went to New Lincoln. They were self-consciously celebrating the fact that they had always had a minority population and were trying to build it up. They felt that they had given women a strong opportunity, and we had some very strong women on the faculty. A woman math teacher was an outstanding person. We had a woman school psychologist who was very strong and capable. The chairman of the board was nominally a man of eighty-five who was a professor emeritus from Columbia, but the de facto chairman of the board was a woman, and she did a great deal to keep that school going. So I guess we had a good deal of input from women. I guess half the core teachers were women. I never felt disadvantaged by the fact that I was a woman.

Q: So those were happy years.

SMYTHE: Yes, they were.

Q: How did you manage at home, with Pam?

SMYTHE: Teaching in the city university system was arranged so that a professor, once he reached a certain status, could coordinate his program so that it would be a convenient one for him. Hugh liked to have lots of classes on one day so he didn't have to go all the way out to Brooklyn every day, and that meant that a large part of the time he was teaching two days a week. Now, he was working very hard on those two days, but he was at home on the others, and many times he arranged it so he would be at home when Pam came home from school. She never carried a key. He would be at home when she came home, and I would usually stay in school until 5:00 or 5:30 and then be home, and it worked out very well. And, of course, during the summer both of us tended to be free.

Q: And then you would go traveling, perhaps?

SMYTHE: We sometimes traveled, but we usually were in New York or on a special assignment. One of us would go overseas at a time. We would almost never go overseas together, except that when Pam was three we all took off for Japan and stayed there two years and kept on going around the world.

Q: You stayed two years in Japan?

SMYTHE: Yes. That was our first overseas experience.

Q: What were you-or your-husband doing?

SMYTHE: This was 1951 to '53. The Japanese educational system had been thoroughly exploited by the war. Students were taken out of classes to work in factories and that sort of thing. So thirty-five American university professors were sent to Japan to serve, one in each of thirty-five national universities-at least the American input into it was going to democratize education. So I went to one university and my husband to another.

Q: So you were two of the thirty-five?

SMYTHE: Yes. We were two of thirty-four, actually, in the beginning. They found the thirty-fifth after we'd already been there a year. And we were the only married couple where both were appointed to work in this program. It was an interesting experience and, in many ways, the foundation of our overseas work and interests. In the first place, we enjoyed it in Japan. We enjoyed the Japanese people, the pace of living, the kind of dignity and perseverance in the people, the hard work that the students put in, and one's sense of humor gets a good working out in Japan.

Q: Where were you located?

SMYTHE: I was in the center of Honshu, on the shores of Lake Biwa, in a little town called Hikone. Have you lived in Japan?

Q: Yes, two years. We were in Kobe, and I went to Lake Biwa for a holiday.

SMYTHE: Oh, that's lovely. Well, I was where the castle stands above the lake. People were so appreciative of children, and Pam was with me. She was three when I went; five when we left. She quickly learned to play with the kids in Japanese. She would watch the way they sat, and when she was speaking Japanese, she sat on her feet with her knees out in front. She went to a Japanese kindergarten. She was way bigger than the children. She was younger than some, but taller than all of them. When they'd have foot races, all of them would put her out, "You run for us." And they'd say, "Kee-aren-chan ichiban!" [Karen is number one!]

Q: What did they call her?

SMYTHE: Ki-ya-re-n-chan. Her first name was Karen. It was Karen Pamela, and when she was little we called her Karen. I don't know why they thought Ke-yah-ren was more "Karen" than "Kahren". I would have assumed it was Kah-ren, but they made it Kee-yaren. Of course, she could outrun everybody, because she was bigger. She was as big as many of the nine-year-olds, and her best friend, in fact, was nine. Chesuko was slightly larger than she was, but this little child and Chesuko hit it off very well. She had been exposed to a lot of things before we got to Japan, and Chesuko enjoyed having a younger girl follow her around and take her word as gospel, and the two of them were just a perfect combination. Years later, Pam and I went back to Japan-ten years after we had left-and went to see our house and looked up the street and saw Chesuko, now a nineteen-year-old, putting her key in the lock. I said, "Chesuko?" and she said, "Ke-yaren-chan!" The two of them liked each other as well as they had as children. It was an interesting experience, because the kids liked to play school, and Chesuko, of course, was about a second-grader.

We had a playroom. It had beds in it-they used the beds for benches-and it had a blackboard, about 4 by 5, a nice big one. Chesuko would get to the front of the room-she was teacher-and she stood by the blackboard and taught the littler ones, who lived in the neighborhood and didn't know as much as she did, how to read and write hiragana, and so Pam learned to read and write those syllables.

One of my Japanese students wanted to study in the United States, and his English was the best I heard on campus. So, at his suggestion, I sent a letter to an old family friend, the president of Morehouse College, and said, "Would you think it's time for Morehouse to have a Japanese student?" This guy went over. He was a stone's throw in front of Martin Luther King. No, after Martin Luther King, right after Martin Luther King. I think King graduated about 1951, and he went to Morehouse in 1952. He graduated with honors from Morehouse. He is now the foremost economic development economist in Japan.

I have seen him very often, because he used to come to the U.N. the way Americans would go to Europe, every year or two. Well, he got so he was coming twice a year. I came home from work one day and found him asleep on the living room sofa, because he had become a part of our family. My parents sponsored him when he went to Morehouse, and they saw him through appendicitis and other trials of being away from home. When they went to Japan, he entertained them. He was really very gracious.

Q: It is a mind-stretching experience to absorb an eastern culture. Were there many other women on the faculty?

SMYTHE: No.

Q: You were the only one, weren't you?

SMYTHE: There was one woman who was a sort of part-time dean of women, but I never saw her. Nobody ever saw her. She didn't go to faculty meetings. Neither did I. I went to a faculty meeting, and they said, "What are you doing here?"

I said, "I understand there's a faculty meeting today."

They said, "Oh, yes. Well, we'll introduce you to the faculty and then you can leave."
[Laughter]

Q: I think "chauvinist pig" was invented for Japanese men, don't you?

SMYTHE: It was. We didn't have but three or four girls on the campus as students.

Q: And the dean didn't have too much work, did she?

SMYTHE: No. I don't know what her assignment was, but this was only a part-time thing.

Q: What was the name of the school that you were at?

SMYTHE: I was at Shiga Daigaku [Shiga University] in the Kansai Gakabu, which is the "economics college", which is why I was there. I think I was the only economist in the group of thirty-five. They wanted me to teach a course in foreign trade and a course in labor relations, and then fill in with English. They needed English teachers, and I didn't really mind because I had had some background in the international phonetic symbols. They asked would I take on an additional assignment to teach the girls who worked in the silk mill, Omikenshi. It was a silk company. They had started the Omikenshi School for the girls who worked in the silk factory so they could continue their education. So I agreed to do a class once a week and taught there, and I went to Otsu once a week and taught a couple of classes on the other campus that was associated with this one in Hikone.

Q: You were in Hikone?

SMYTHE: Yes.

Q: And your husband was-

SMYTHE: He was in Yamaguchi. His subject was sociology, but he was also teaching English. The president of his university was a very distinguished man who had spent some time in the United States, and he was horrified when the war began, because he knew what might be available in the United States. He took home some movies he had made of the United States and showed them around, and people realized that they might have underestimated U.S. power. The government was not too keen on his movies and prevailed on him not to show them too much.

He was a distinguished authority in Noh chanting and taught a group of people how to do it. He invited us to watch them when they came to do this. I met his daughter when I went to Japan in 1984, and he had passed on. He was already a man considered up in age then, but a very distinguished gentleman.

We have many happy memories of Japan. Times have not always been easy; challenges have always been there, but I was never really depressed. I tend to find the possibilities in a situation and look on those, and not fall on the seamy side too much. Otherwise, I suppose I wouldn't survive.

Q: Well, your two-year contracts were up, and so then you came back to the States, did you?

SMYTHE: Right. But we took three months coming back.

Q: Where did you go? The other way?

SMYTHE: The other way. We found that if we started working on it after we'd been there six or eight months, we were told that we could take the money it would cost to take us home and go other ways. Well, we were taken over first class on the American President Lines.

Q: The Cleveland or the Wilson?

SMYTHE: The Cleveland. President Cleveland. So what we did was map out a way of taking a freighter from Kobe to Hong Kong, from Hong Kong to Bombay on a P&O ship, and then another P&O ship from Bombay to Marseille. Then we went over land and took the American President Lines across the Atlantic. It was really marvelous. I think we took the President Wilson coming back. We were on both the Cleveland and the Wilson, one crossing the Pacific and one crossing the Atlantic.

Q: It was a very nice way to travel, wasn't it?

SMYTHE: It was a great way to travel. I am not a good sailor and I get seasick if the sea is rough, but we were traveling at a time when the sea wasn't too rough and most of the time I was really quite content. I was always glad to get ashore, though, on my land legs again. Pam had no problem at all with seasickness. She was just fine.

Q: What do you feel you took away from your experiences in Japan?

SMYTHE: I got involved in international education when I was there. I started out, like many Americans, seeing the world as a pyramid, with us at the apex and everybody else at the bottom struggling to get up, but I began to understand that there are people who had pride in their own way of doing things and didn't really want to become Americans. They wanted what Americans had, particularly the power, but they didn't necessarily want to wield it in the same ways. I still have a feeling of comradeship with Japan over some of the things that the Japanese like and do and think. I think their ability to concentrate on what they want to accomplish and just brush hardships aside and go ahead is a marvelous thing.

Q: How did you feel about the way they educated their children, the amount of drill and pressure on them?

SMYTHE: At the time, I didn't know a great deal about education, but I had grown up in a semi-progressive school in the South and the rigidity appalled me. It didn't appall me that children had to get their pails and brushes and wash the floors after they had finished. I thought, "My goodness, we would do better if we had our kids share in some of the real tasks that have to be done." I think we make a mistake in thinking that children are benefitted when everything is made easy for them. So I liked the discipline and the hard work and the perfectionism. I tend to be a perfectionist myself, so I understand that. But I really did gag at seeing small children allowed to do anything, even slap their mothers in the face and call them "fool," and then a year later having them squashed if they said anything out of line.

Q: The boom is dropped on their heads at a certain age and that's it, isn't it? It must make them quite schizophrenic, I should think.

SMYTHE: I would think so. I came home one day and found Pam scared of the-what do they call them, the bogeyman?

Q: Oh, yes. I can't remember.

SMYTHE: The feeling that you are cruel if you spare the stick and scare kids to death, that horrified me terribly. And, yet, I found that people were understanding and kind, and could be. One Japanese said to me, "We can be terribly cruel people." He was old enough. He was one of the graduate students we got, a public school teacher, actually, who was doing graduate work on the side, that we helped to get a scholarship to come to the United States. He said, "I remember seeing someone who was in the Army with me, and he used the wrong pronoun in speaking of the emperor, and instead of explaining that he made a mistake, they simply knocked him senseless. Of course, he never made that mistake again, but did you really need to be that drastic to drive your point home?"

Q: Well, with the emphasis so heavily on coming in ichiban, it makes them do some rather underhanded things.

SMYTHE: One of my students committed suicide the summer after my first three or four months in Japan. Came back at the end of the year and here he was no more. I had them come over to my house every Thursday night, or whatever day it was, and I would make cookies and have tea, and we'd sit around and drink tea and eat cookies and talk. We spoke in English and they loved having practice, and they had an opportunity to sing songs in English or whatever else. I enjoyed that. But there were so many different kinds of things: this business of having everybody stand when I entered the room and then sit down when dismissed, was very strange to an American, and there were other things.

Q: But you must have had great respect because you were a sensei.

SMYTHE: Yes. And the fact that I was a woman didn't really seem to handicap me with the students.

Q: The title was enough.

SMYTHE: That's right.

Q: How did your household help treat you and your husband? Was he first always? Because you were both teachers.

SMYTHE: You know, I don't have a real recollection of that, because he was mostly in his own place. We were up to a fifteen-hour train ride apart. But they gave him one of these City University schedules so that he taught three days a week, and if he wanted to spend three days, he traveled two overnights and had three or four days.

Q: I didn't realize that was fifteen hours apart.

SMYTHE: Well, it isn't now.

Q: No. But the roads were so appalling then. Yamaguchi, is where, exactly?

SMYTHE: That's down near Hiroshima. It's between Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the train line.

Q: So he was able to come back more often that you could go down?

SMYTHE: Yes, because I had the baby. I didn't travel except when we had vacation. When we had vacation, I went to his house because he had the more pleasant house. So we spent the long vacations at his house and the weekend ones at mine.

Q: Were they Japanese houses you lived in?

SMYTHE: Mine was designed by an American missionary. It had a tatami room, but it was really intended to be an American house and it had American furniture. The bathtub was really something to tell about. They had built sort of a concrete bathtub, and it was a great big thing; it was like a trough. I guess they found that it was just too rough on the human body, so they got an old clawfoot bathtub and set it inside the other. [Laughter] You could run water in it, and when you pulled the plug, the water just ran out into the other tub, because there was no pipe connecting them. But it worked all right. It was not easy to clean well.

Now, Hugh's house was a Japanese house, except that they had floors in it and he had regular Western furniture. He had tatami somewhere-I can't remember where-and their concession to heat-we had stoves for heating. He had a very modern kind of stove. We had been afraid of how I would take care of Pam's milk, so I brought a little two cubic foot electric refrigerator from the States and it was duly installed and we made do with that. They bought Hugh a six-foot refrigerator made in Japan. It worked perfectly well. Mine never made ice cubes. The president of the university said shyly one day he would appreciate it if I would send him my surplus ice. I had two ice cube trays, about six inches long, making cubes less than an inch in diameter, but I never got ice cubes because the current was off fifteen minutes of every hour. As soon as you got cold enough so it started freezing, it would melt again. I never knew how to explain tactfully to him that I never had surplus ice because I never had ice. But he learned, because when I left he asked if he could buy my refrigerator.

Q: What did you heat in the stove? You burned wood, did you, or was it gas?

SMYTHE: We had bottled gas to cook.

Q: How did you heat your house?

SMYTHE: A stove. A stove was in the living room, and we had an oil heater, I think kerosene or something like that. I was very careful with such things.

Q: I didn't know if you had to use hibachis.

SMYTHE: No, we were spared that.

Q: Because the smell of charcoal is so bad, for children especially.

SMYTHE: Quite suffocating, yes. We were all right there. We didn't have any of those pits in the floor for you to put your feet over them. I remember going visiting, putting my feet down there, and at 120 degrees, they were perspiring so and my back was freezing. [Laughter]Q: When you came back to the United States, finally, after that wonderful trip all around the world, how did it hit you?

SMYTHE: We got as far as Paris when I got word that the NAACP was doing work on the school segregation cases and would like us to work on them. Hugh was committed already, but I was not, so I worked with them all that summer and until November.

Q: In Paris?

SMYTHE: In New York, but they wired me in Paris to be ready for it. I got a great deal out of that experience and learned a lot about the workings of a case through the Supreme Court. I took a minor in law at Wisconsin, so this was fascinating to me from that standpoint.

Q: When you got back to the States, did it strike you as being foreign?

SMYTHE: No.

Q: Had you been home at all in the interim?

SMYTHE: No. Two years and two weeks without any-it wasn't two years and two weeks. It was two years and a quarter, because we didn't get back home until the thirtieth of June and we had left home the first of March, I think. Two years and a quarter. Pam used to say we were in Japan two years and two weeks. That was what she said, because we left almost the same time we had arrived there.

Q: But the States were just as you left it?

SMYTHE: Pretty much as we left it.

Q: No culture shock?

SMYTHE: No real culture shock. We had a little in Japan. It astonished me, because Hugh was an anthropologist and had been unable to do field work for his degree because of the war. He would make reservations to go. He was to go to Africa, and then he couldn't go to Africa, and so he made them to go to Honduras. Each time he'd get to the airport, some general would need to ride and they'd take his seat, so he ended up doing a library dissertation. But the reality of it was something. We used to talk long hours about the differences in values, and some things that we thought were not important at all, they thought were just terribly vital, and vice versa.

Q: Did you have help in the house?

SMYTHE: Yes. When we started, I had an older woman who was an issei. She had gone to work in Vancouver, Canada, when she was a girl and had learned English, had grown up most of her life in Canada and then had come back to Japan. She had a son who spoke very good English. He had been born in Canada, and his wife was a Japanese girl he had met and married later. Well, she needed to earn some money, so when the older woman decided the work was too much for her, she asked if I'd take her daughter-in-law, and I did. She couldn't speak English at all, but she helped me to learn Japanese. When I got bronchitis, I was able to speak to her in my minimum basic Japanese in such a way that she could explain to the doctor in good Japanese what I was saying. It was a very interesting thing.

Q: You were able to manage with just one person helping you?

SMYTHE: Yes.

Q: I imagine both women made quite a fuss over your daughter, didn't they, because they do love children.

SMYTHE: Yes, they loved her. And if I got on a train, I was assured of solicitous attention from everybody around.

Q: Does your daughter retain any memories of this time?

SMYTHE: Not a lot. She became very proficient in speaking Japanese, and she can't speak any of it now. But ten years later we went back, and she met Chesuko again and had a good experience, but not one that was long enough. It lasted a week, I think, not long enough to remember very much. We were in Tokyo for three days and were in Hikone for only two and traveling around for a couple more. She went over to the 1970 World's Fair, but that was with a group from New York, and she hasn't been again.

Q: How was your Japanese?

SMYTHE: My Japanese has stuck with me a little. When I went around Japan this past summer-in June of '85 I was there-I was able to do some traveling about on my own (I was with a group). We had a girl interpreter, but she couldn't be with all of us at once when we were out shopping and whatnot, and I was able to manage with my little Japanese-sukoshi.

Q: Do many more Japanese speak English than they did at that time? Because it was very rare to find anybody who did in those days.

SMYTHE: I learned the trick, and that was look for the pointed cap. A boy in a pointed cap has been in school long enough to have learned some English. He may not understand what you're saying, but you can write it down and he can understand. A good deal of it is better done than it was, but they still speak Japanese English.

Q: Why don't we break here and we'll pick it up the next time with these integration cases, because I think that is going to be fascinating.

SMYTHE: It's a fascinating thing. That was a very exciting time and a time when television came into its own as a news medium. I have a feeling that a lot of the support for civil rights was strengthened by seeing the level of cruelty for the first time. Many people really had no idea of how that was.

Third Interview - June 18, 1986

Q: You could perhaps begin by telling me why the NAACP wanted you-

SMYTHE: Needed me.

Q: Yes, needed you. Exactly.

SMYTHE: What happened was, while I was away in Japan, they combined five cases of educational discrimination in public schools from five different parts of the country, one of them being the District of Columbia, into the school segregation cases. They argued that before the Supreme Court, and just before we returned, the Supreme Court asked them to submit a brief for re-arguing the case. I do not remember now the technical reasons why, but they had posed certain questions which had not been answered in the preceding brief and felt that to give a sensible opinion they needed to have answers to those questions.

The response of the NAACP, the Legal Defense Fund, which was headed by Thurgood Marshall at that time, decided that the way to go about it was to convene a group of social scientists all over the country to present material evidence. If I remember correctly, there were about 135 people involved, because they needed a group in each state. They wanted a statement of what happened to that state at the time, what was going on in terms of school segregation or lack thereof, and (if it was a state which had fought against the Union) under what terms it was readmitted to the Union. So Horace Mann Bond, the president—was he president of Lincoln University then or dean of the School of Education at Atlanta University; I forget which. He held both of those positions, and I think at that time he was dean of the School of Education. His responsibility was primarily to make sure the educational research was done. Kenneth Clark was to make sure that the psychological and psychiatric implications were covered. John Davis, who was chairman of the department of government at City College in New York, was director of research and I was deputy director of research. I had another job besides coordination, though. I was to do the research end of the arguments in Congress and to go through the Congressional Record and identify quotations which indicated the intent of Congress when they passed the Fourteenth Amendment.

They had, in addition, lawyers from all over the country, and every now and then they would have a meeting in New York of lawyers. I remember Bob Ming, who was on the faculty of the University of Chicago Law School, I believe; James Nabrit, who was president of Howard University, had been the dean of the law school at Howard and was, in his legal capacity, a member of the team; Spottswood Robinson, III, now a federal judge, was one of that group; and there were people all over the country who had argued cases for the NAACP or who had had experience particularly relevant to these issues. So it was an exciting group of people to work with. There were several professors from Columbia, Yale, and Harvard who were part of the team. It was an interracial team.

I remember the attention they gave to specific issues. We would come across an issue. Part of the responsibility of the lawyers was to predict what kinds of issues and viewpoints could be raised by their opponents on the other side so they would be prepared to scuttle those arguments with counter-arguments, and so on. I remember going into the New York public library, where they have a complete file of the Congressional Record, and getting issues back in 1865 and '66 and so on and having sitting at the same table a researcher for the other side who was doing the same thing.

I came in and said to Thurgood one day, "The opposition has its man in the public library."

He said, "Oh, yes. I very often introduce myself and discuss the matter with such people."

I said, "Well, I asked him, '½Are you doing a thesis, too?'" [Laughter]

This was 1953. It was during the summer of '53. The brief had to be in the hands of the court by sometime in early September, and it arrived, at least in the printer's hand, something like the first week in September. I think we finished drafting it in August. The argument before the Supreme Court, if I remember correctly, was early in December, and I went to Washington to hear the arguments. There were so few seats in the Supreme Court that getting space was a problem. I got a place in the court by maneuvering. I had an uncle in Washington who knew somebody connected with Justice Burton, who got an invitation for my aunt and me to attend the hearing. That did for the first day, but there were three days, and the other two days I was a reporter for the New York Amsterdam News. I filed my story each afternoon at the end of the sessions, with the help of Ethel Payne, who was an experienced journalist.

Q: Was Amsterdam News a small New York paper?

SMYTHE: Yes, a New York paper, a black newspaper out of Harlem. I think it is still in existence; I don't know.

Q: What was this case called when it came to court, so and so versus what?

SMYTHE: Wait a minute. It was the name of the girl in Arkansas, I believe. Because of alphabetical order, the Arkansas papers entered first. I can't remember. She's since grown up, but her name was the name on petition.

Q: What was it, versus the United States or versus the state or something?

SMYTHE: I've got the case folder. I still have a copy of the brief: Brown v. Topeka.

Q: How did it come out?

SMYTHE: Six months later I was in my living room-I think I was vacuum cleaning-I had turned on the news and I heard, "Today the Supreme Court struck down segregation in the public schools." I jumped three feet into the air and ran to the telephone and called Thurgood Marshall. He said, "Come down. We're all gathering here to celebrate." So I got dressed very quickly, went down to the office, and we talked and talked and autographed briefs and whatnot. This came later. He had one done for each member of the team with our names on it. The one that he autographed that day I have, but it's not here. I have that put away. It's quite an historic document, and it's one of a very strong memory. At the time, if I had not had other things to do, I would have stopped then and there to write about the historical implications of this, because there were so many parallels in the history that recommended them as you went through it. I knew it was an experience that was going to be remarkable. It was a high-water mark in my life.

Q: Of course it was. Well, in the lives of all right-thinking people.

SMYTHE: Oh indeed. Incidentally, the attorney for the opposing side was once a candidate for the President of the United States. He was a candidate in 1920 or thereabouts. [John Davis 1924] So here was this venerable man with a very distinguished record in some ways, but very much on the wrong side where we were concerned.

Q: You were extremely active in all of these important issues; did you actually participate in politics per se?

SMYTHE: Never. I never had political ambitions or thought of it as an appropriate arena for me. I tended to work behind the scenes. I didn't mind being visible, but I didn't step up to claim leadership. I wanted to have time to think about things. . .to change my mind if necessary. I was more concerned with getting the right answers and having adequate time to think them through. I'm not a quick study in decision-making. I agonize over ambiguities and the problems.

Q: You said that it was such an interesting experience for you to be in Japan and to have a taste of international education.

SMYTHE: The business of international education had been of interest to me, anyway. We started, as I told you earlier, placing Japanese students, but we had also known the students from Africa who came to Atlanta, and Mother was interested in the faculty members who came from other countries, so that we had a fairly healthy curiosity. It probably was a substitute for having travel money, since we didn't have money to travel. There was one family in Atlanta that traveled a good deal and took eight millimeter movies of their various trips, mostly to Europe, but also to the Caribbean and whatnot. They'd share these with us, and I thought, "Oh, when I am through with getting an education, what I'd like to do is make enough money so I can travel." It had always been an aim of mine. Well, this satisfied that aim, and I found that as soon as you became devoted to international education, you were handed from one person to another. Other people were interested.

On our way home, we saw just Egypt, but we could say we had set foot on the African continent. We came the long way. It was only Egypt that we saw in Africa, but we went through a bit of the Middle East and stopped at Yemen.

Q: You came up through Suez, did you?

SMYTHE: Suez, came by ship, and then did half a dozen countries in Europe. That just whetted our appetites for going back and doing more, so we started responding to these friends in Japan who kept coming over, until something like thirty-five or thirty-six had come to the United States. By that time, the movement for more attention to Africa came along. I think I told you about Jim Robinson, who had visited me in Japan and ultimately developed the Crossroads Africa program to take American students to Africa for the summer. In 1958, he wanted me to take the first group to Nigeria, so I was leader of that first group. Hugh was not able to serve as a leader that year because he had a Ford Foundation grant to do research in Africa, so he went over in 1957 to do his research and came back in 1958, but before I left to go to Africa.

Q: Where was he?

SMYTHE: He went all through the west coast, from Morocco on down, stopping at every country on the way. He spent most of his time in Nigeria, too, and so both of us had an experience and a bit of depth in Nigeria, and wrote a book about Nigeria based on his research. I contributed mostly to the literary part of that rather than the research part, though I had gathered some data to work with it. That was published in 1960 by Stanford University Press.

As soon as we were identified as people with an interest in Africa and an experience there, we were asked to participate in lots of things. For instance, AID was sending a group of teachers to East Africa, and we were asked to come to Columbia University and speak to them about some of the cross-cultural experiences they might expect. There was a reception at the Church of the Master in New York for the first airlift group coming from Kenya, and we briefed students on American education: what to expect in going to American schools, how might they be different, and what could they do that would ensure the best chance to do well and succeed in their studies, that kind of thing.

One thing led to another, and we got involved in meetings of groups, like the American Society of African Culture. When someone would have a new leader from Africa-for instance, Julius Nyerere came over-and I remember a meeting at which he, before the independence of Tanzania-at that time Tanganyika-talked about how he looked upon his country and his leadership in that country. When Tom Mboya came over, we met him; when Kenneth Kaunda came over, we met him, so we got to be parts of the "Africa crowd." It was a heady time and there were a number of conferences, a number of attempts to educate people on the meaning of Africa and its importance to the United States, or its lack thereof, so we became known as Africanists and remained Africanists the rest of our professional careers, really.

Q: How did it happen that your husband was sent to the Middle East, then, as the ambassador? Have we reached that point in your story yet, or is there something else?

SMYTHE: There wasn't much time between. In 1960, our book on Nigeria was published. In 1961, Hugh went to join the U.S. mission to the United Nations. He had met Harlan Cleveland. Harlan had been dean of the graduate school of Syracuse University, and he was working out a program to take graduate students to Nigeria. Hugh was freshly back from Nigeria and one of the contemporary experts on it, so he asked if Hugh would go over to Nigeria and supervise a group of graduate students from Syracuse that summer. Hugh agreed to do it about March or April; whereupon, Harlan was asked to become assistant secretary of state for international organizations and to recommend someone to advise Adlai Stevenson on some of these issues, and he called Hugh and asked, "Would you mind giving up that one and taking this one?" Hugh decided he would like to go the USUN. So he went to USUN in June, before school even closed, I think, as soon as he had had his final exams, and started working there.

Toward the end of the summer, he went to Geneva to handle some of the economic and social problems. He was working with Philip Klutznick then. Phil was later secretary of commerce under the Carter administration, a very bright, able, articulate man. He and Father Ted Hesburgh were two of the most expert expressers of their points of view that we knew. They both speak with such clarity, logic and organization. Anyway, Hugh was working with Phil, and found that a very satisfying assignment. It was a challenging one. He had had relatively little experience, but in the process, they found he was so broad in his view of things, so intent on learning all the angles, that he wasn't thought of as limited to Africa or to Japan, and he gained a good deal of experience in working with people in government.

Q: What was the conference in Geneva that he was at with Klutznick?

SMYTHE: There were various ones. There was one over coffee and what about pricing and what should be the trade agreements regarding coffee. There were several products of that nature that were the subject of concern.

Q: Basically it was all trade?

SMYTHE: No, basically it was economic issues of various kinds, mostly trade, but he was also working with the social issues, the disadvantages of the developing countries and the problems they had with being responsible for trade when their prices kept falling and the prices of manufactured things kept climbing, so he was involved in that.

Q: In other words, the impact these trade deficits would have on them.

SMYTHE: Yes, while he was there, I was simply here in the United States during the winter, and then in the summer, that was when I became involved with the Council on Student Travel. In the summer of 1961, I took my first trip with the Council on Student Travel. Hugh was working here at USUN, Pam was away in summer camp, and I was in Europe for three weeks. I went over and stayed three weeks and came back, and it amounted to five weeks because I was traveling by boat and training students on the way. Then toward the end of that summer, I think, Hugh went to Geneva and was away. Then he came back in the fall and was at U.N. all that year, and I was at the New Lincoln School. Pam was then in boarding school.

Q: Where did you send her to school?

SMYTHE: The Windsor Mountain School in Massachusetts.

Q: I thought perhaps she might have come to your school.

SMYTHE: Oh, she had been there, but she and I decided that when it came to high school, which was my part of the school, it would inhibit her too much to have a mother who was principal. I would have trusted myself to at least keep my hands off, but she felt it was just too inhibitive.

Q: But it would inhibit the teachers, I'm sure.

SMYTHE: Yes.

Q: Where is the Windsor Mountain School?

SMYTHE: It was in Lenox, Massachusetts. It's not now in existence. But a member of the faculty suggested it. Her daughter had spent the summer there, and Eleanor thought very highly of it and told me about it. I took Pam on a visit to several schools, and when it came to Windsor Mountain School-this was in the fall of her eighth-grade year-they said, "You are ahead of your class in so many ways that, if you wanted to come for the second semester, we think you could be placed in the ninth grade this year." So she was overjoyed. Her best friend was away at boarding school, so she thought she'd like to do it. She left in January. My brother and I drove her up. Hugh was away. We took her there on a snowy day when there had been a blizzard in New York, but the expressways were cleared. So we got her there, and she was fine and so enthusiastic. She didn't worry about our departure at all, and it worked out well.

Q: So that really gave you an empty nest.

SMYTHE: Gave me an empty nest, and it took us something like two and a half hours to drive up and see her, maybe three hours.

Q: Too far to do it on the spur of the moment.

SMYTHE: A little too far for the spur of the moment, but we went up. One of our neighbors-in fact, two of our neighbors-heard about the school and sent their children, and Harry Belafonte sent his daughter, who had been at New Lincoln, so that she had some children she had known who were up there and she made friends quickly. So it worked out well. After she graduated, I said, "Now, if you had to do it all over again, would you go to Windsor Mountain?" And she said, "Yes, I would." So I felt vindicated. You always feel torn, and I didn't want her to feel pushed out of the nest.

Q: She obviously didn't if she was that happy and easily adjusted to it.

SMYTHE: She would come home, bringing with her a child or two that the headmistress thought needed to see a family that was complete. The first time she did it, she brought two kids. It was so touching; when they left, one of them referred to me as "Mother." A lot of children of divorce go to boarding schools, and I hadn't realized how important that was. I knew there were Foreign Service families who sent children and that sometimes people lived where there weren't good schools. Those children had whole families to go to, but there were a lot who didn't.

Q: This was not coed? This was just girls?

SMYTHE: No, it was coed.

Q: Do you believe in coeducation all the way through?

SMYTHE: Yes. I went to a girls' high school one year and to a girls' college all four years so that I had experience with it, but the majority of my years, all of my elementary school and three years of my high school, were coed years.

Q: And you think it's an enriching experience?

SMYTHE: I think it is. I think there's a very good point to be made that girls simply get everything to do if they are the only ones there, and they get experience with being head of this and that. When I was editor of the high school paper, there were boys there anyway, but many students might have been more aware of boys. I was very young and therefore was not as concerned with dates as other kids at that time. I was fourteen when I edited the high school paper, so I guess there wasn't the same conflict with me. But there were many girls who were already young ladies, so to speak.

Q: What effect do you think it has had on you and on your views of life that you did go to school two years ahead of yourself? Would you advise it for your own child?

SMYTHE: I don't really think it hurt me. When Pam was coming along, I was surrounded by people who felt that the social adjustment was so much more important than the educational adjustment that we shouldn't rush her. I felt Pam wanted to hurry. She was annoyed that she had to be one of two students who were doing algebra when the rest of the students weren't there yet, and she thought being ahead had always been a disadvantage to her. It took her out of the mainstream. She even experimented with not doing so well to see whether that helped, and of course it didn't, because she was bored by what she already understood. I think she would say move on, because an intelligent child understands, but then it depends on the personality, I guess. I had older sisters.

Q: But in the long run, Pam doesn't feel it hurt her?

SMYTHE: No. She wasn't as far ahead as I was. She was a sixteen-year-old college freshman, though.

Q: That's pretty young.

SMYTHE: That's pretty young, and we were halfway around the world in Syria.

Q: Now, your husband was at USUN and you were working, of course, as principal of the New Lincoln School and Pam was at Windsor Mountain School. Does that cover what you did through her high school years?

SMYTHE: Yes. I stayed there until she was out of high school and stayed there much longer. In '64, she went to college, and we went to Syria in '65 at the end of her freshman year, the beginning of her sophomore year. That was a great distance, but we had lots of family here. A favorite cousin of hers was her family for the Christmas vacation. She decided not to come out, but to go visit Carol in Detroit.

Q: What college did she choose?

SMYTHE: She started out at Brandeis, which was very funny for someone in Syria. So when they asked where she was going to college, I would say Boston and hope they inferred Boston University or even Boston College. But she changed to NYU. She did a junior year abroad at University of Madrid, and that was on a program sponsored by NYU. At the end of that, we went home. We had been ridden out of town on a rail in Syria, of course, and when we went home-

Q: In '67, this was?

SMYTHE: In '67. It was with Hugh that they broke off relations during the Six-Day War, and so we were evacuated to Spain, at least dependents were. As soon as I got there, we cabled the embassy in Madrid not to send her to Syria, but to Rome, where we had safe haven. She was due within a day or two in Syria, and they knew she wasn't to go there under the circumstances. So she came on to Rome, and on the way back we stopped by Madrid and picked up her things and had them shipped to the United States. Meanwhile, Hugh remained in Rome in a kind of embassy-in-exile for a while. We were in Rome two or three weeks. When he went home, we went to New York, he went to Washington, because I needed to get back to the apartment. We had tenants in the apartment while we were away, and we needed to reestablish home base.

It was a couple of months before they decided where he was to go next, and that was Malta. Pam and I were going to stay in New York while he went on to start with Malta, because this was going to be an election year. We weren't sure how long he would be there. So I finished up the school year while he did his first five months in Malta; then I joined him.

Q: What were you doing back here?

SMYTHE: I headed the New Lincoln School.

Q: You were on a leave of absence, I suppose, when he was in Syria?

SMYTHE: When he was in Syria, I took a two-year leave. He didn't know about Malta until a little late, so I started the year. He wasn't to go until the end of December. I think he had Christmas in New York and then he went to Malta. We remained in New York that year, in a funny kind of situation. We weren't sure whether we were going or staying, so we left the tenants in our apartment, because a friend of ours was going to be away. He was the executive secretary of the Japan Society, and he had to go to Japan to change his office over. He was going to be at the Japanese office, and so we sublet his apartment. That was 1968, until the spring of '69. Then Hugh came back from Malta. We stayed in the apartment of this acquaintance until June or July or August, something like that, and then we went to our own apartment and the tenants went to an apartment of their own.

Hugh was to be in Malta-this was '68-another year, but Nixon had already been elected, so there was no point in his going back to Malta on a long-term basis. So we just went over there for the summer again, in the summer of '69, and took part in his farewells to the diplomatic corps. He came back and that was the end of diplomacy for a while.

Q: He had been with USUN, and that's obviously diplomacy, but how did he happen to be approached to take a chief of mission in the Middle East?

SMYTHE: I don't know precisely how that happened. We had done very little traveling in the Middle East, but he had done some writing that included the Middle East. He was lecturing at the Foreign Service Institute, and one day, in the middle of a lecture, someone handed him a message saying, "Please call John Mason (I think) in the White House."

So he said, "All right. As soon as I finish my lecture, I'll call."

He said, "No. Now."

And Hugh excused himself and went to see what it was, and it was the appointment to Syria. They said they were going to send a car for him; they didn't say what it was. They said a car was coming for him, be ready, and he should go right away. So he went and talked with whoever this was, chairman of the Civil Service Commission or something. It sounds like an inappropriate assignment to be telling him, but it was someone on the White House staff, asking how he would like to serve in Syria.

Q: Was this the first inkling he had?

SMYTHE: The very first. He hadn't been told anything about it. When he came home that night, that was quite a surprise.

Q: How did you feel about it?

SMYTHE: Excited, because he had had a lifelong wish to go into diplomacy. Hugh had been nominated by his school for a Rhodes scholarship, back in the days when there were no black Rhodes scholars, so it didn't get anywhere. But he had said that if he could major in international law he would, and he'd go into foreign affairs. At one point, the NAACP was interested in pushing the State Department to appoint some blacks, and they said, "Well, we don't know any suitable ones." They said, "We'll get some for you. Send some interviewers." So Hugh and I were interviewed. I was interviewed as a spouse, not as a candidate.

Q: It was Lyndon Johnson's approach to the NAACP?

SMYTHE: No, this was years before. The NAACP had nothing to do with his appointment. No, this came to naught. This was back in the 1940s. It was about '48 or '49, something like that. We went down and were interviewed and treated politely and that was the end of that, and nothing else happened. In 1960 or '61, I think it was, Mennen Williams was Assistant Secretary for Africa and he started an Advisory Council on African affairs. I was a member of that council and Hugh was, and we began interacting with the State Department in a number of ways.

Q: You were very familiar with the organization, then?

SMYTHE: Yes. I had had a diplomatic passport from 1962. This experience in '61-'62, whetted Hugh's appetite again. What happened was, there was a friend of ours, David Jones, who had graduated from law school at Harvard and had gone into politics. He was a brother-in-law of Secretary Pierce of HUD. But David was a Democrat; Sam was a Republican. He came to us one day and said, "I am getting up a list of people who have a background in foreign experience, and I want to have curricula vitae that explain what you've done internationally and give me an idea of what kinds of jobs you might be interested in." So I wrote on mine I'd be interested in international student activity, particularly placing students from other countries in American universities and vice versa. In a matter of a couple of months, I was asked to join the Advisory Commission on Educational Exchange.

Hugh's appointment took longer. They were thinking in terms of chief of mission, because he had already, by the time that this came up, had the U.N. exposure. It was '65 when he was approached. He had already done a lot of things with regard to Africa, had been back to Africa again, and we had published the book in 1960. Syria was the kind of place where expertise in the Middle East was less important than being able to stand firm on some issues and negotiate, and Hugh was not without some acquaintance with the Middle East. So that's how it happened. I think they were just filling a spot there.

Q: This must have been an interesting departure for you both. It's such a cloistered life, almost, at an embassy in a hardship post like Damascus.

SMYTHE: It was. There was such opportunity for growth. Neither of us had been exposed to much in the way of archeology, and the first recreational trip I went out of my way to take after I got to Syria was to-I had already seen the ruins at Baalbek on another visit to the Middle East. I attended a conference in '62 in Beirut and had taken a side trip to Baalbek. But the first trip I got after I went to Syria was to see the ruins of a town. I can't remember the name of it now, Ramesh or something like that. It was not far from the Bekaa Valley. It had a great many ruins and underground they had great cavernous water-not tanks-they were natural open spaces that could hold enough water to keep a town of 10,000 for a year.

Q: Sort of cisterns.

SMYTHE: Sort of natural cisterns, yes. They had three huge ones underground. Anyway, I was absolutely fascinated and it kept me going while I was there. I thoroughly enjoyed this.

The refugee issue came to me then. I first became interested in refugees through the Palestinians. And the third thing is that, anthropologically, it was so exciting, and the people are nice people, interesting. The land is dry and forbidding in lots of spots, but there's enough good agricultural land so that Syria would never starve no matter what governing system they had, if they'd give people a chance.

Q: Also, historically it's so rich with the crusaders' castles.

SMYTHE: It was marvelous. I went through those crusaders' castles. The legends that have grown up around Syria-it's just exciting.

Q: Yes, it is; it's fascinating. That's a pretty active spot. Syria is constantly quarreling with neighbors and constantly sealing off borders and then reopening them.

SMYTHE: And their crazy, crazy government. We hadn't been there five months before they shot the president out of office. They had an uprising one morning. After that, I made my calls to the wives of the Cabinet all over again, and before I got quite finished, here came another coup.

Q: And you had it to do again.

SMYTHE: That time I didn't trouble too much. We had been in Syria four and a half or five months when the first coup came. It seems to me that was around February in '66. We lay low for a while, then after eight or ten months, there was another change of government, and that time we didn't know whether there was any point in doing my calls. So we observed things and did what we could, and eventually the Six-Day War came about and off we went.

Q: Did the State Department give you much preparation?

SMYTHE: I took the wives' briefing course. Hugh took the senior seminar. We didn't go over until October, and his appointment had been announced in July. He took the usual briefings, but then the senior seminar was coming up, and because of the security issues in Syria, it seemed wise for him to have more than the usual, and so he had that. It was in-where was it? in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, I think. So he had a good deal of preparation. I found the wives' briefing course very interesting.

Q: Does it cover everything you need to know?

SMYTHE: To go back that far, in '65, it seemed to, and yet there were some wives who had not had the exposure that I had to overseas situations, and I'm not sure that they got as much help in understanding how to approach another continent as they needed, but I confess I'm a bug on that. That is such a sensitive issue. So important. I had had such a good experience, both in Japan and with Crossroads Africa. Traveling in Europe, you don't really have nearly the need for sensitivity that you do in developing places, where people simply cannot be expected to know anything about where we come from.

I found some very strange things, even in the past few years, that people perceive my conversations about schools as meaning schools like their schools. I went as an AMPART last year to Africa, and one of the places I spoke was Zanzibar. The Zanzibaris took for granted the fact that people paid tuition and bought their own books, and something that they said alerted me to this assumption. They said to me, "How can you talk about progress for blacks in the United States when they're too poor to pay school tuition and buy books? You don't educate black children." I said, "I'm sorry, you have a misconception. We arrest parents if they don't send their children to school. We are very upset if people don't send their children to school. They are required by law to do so." And it developed that they thought that most blacks are poor and on welfare and unable to pay school fees, and therefore the children are out of school. You have no way of knowing that they assume something like that, unless you know that public schools are not free in all countries. In the past two decades, I've been collecting more and more information about how people need to prepare themselves to approach another culture, and I am still learning every time I'm exposed.

Q: Do you feel the Foreign Service Institute could profit by more enrichment in that field?

SMYTHE: I think always. And I think there's another danger that we don't always recognize. Some Americans are so anxious to make friends, so ready to listen to the other side, that they forget they're representing the United States, and I found some who went overboard in imitating other countries, other nationals. I was visiting a country once and the cultural affairs officer had me over to dinner, and he was so proud at having trained his four-year-old son to kiss my hand. Well, I cringed. It's so un-American, so unrecognizable. I think we go overboard when we think we must take whole things that are really not normal and comfortable in the United States.

Q: Always be yourself, is what you would say, although you can appreciate others.

SMYTHE: I think that being ourselves is terribly important. You can say anything to people in another culture, within reason. You can say even unpleasant things to people if you understand how they look at things and phrase your offering in a way that they can understand and accept, but they have to know that you're not coming at them with animosity. They have to know that you're coming at them with some perception of where they stand and how they see things. So whenever I send a group of students overseas or take them overseas, I want plenty of time to talk about why we listen and why we're careful with our very body posture, that some people take exception to my sitting so that the sole of my foot is facing somebody.

This has become something of a specialty of mine. I co-directed a program to send students from the Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern overseas for a summer's internship. We had that program beginning in 1984, really the fall of '83, and I insisted on enough time to give them a sense of what they needed to know. I didn't have enough time and money and budget to give them as full an orientation as I would like, but we got as much time as we could give them and packed it full of suggestions and examples.

Q: Do you write your own materials for this?

SMYTHE: Yes, and we had a couple of experts in who had things to say and who had produced films that we could use.

Q: There's another facet to this Foreign Service life that I'm particularly interested in, especially since you were in a Middle Eastern country. I'm sure you know as well as I do that the Arabists from the State Department are a body unto themselves, and they consider that they are the experts. Also, as with any area specialists, they worry about who gets what job. Did you experience any sort of feeling that "you took one of our jobs away"?

SMYTHE: Not really. There was some of this around, and maybe I just didn't hear the negatives as much as the positives, but we had a middle-level officer, who became an ambassador himself later on, who said to my husband, "I have learned more from you than I have from anybody else up to this point." Once [Hugh] sent in an analysis that our policy toward the Middle East was less understanding than it might have been, less sensitive to certain aspects of Arab views and so on. A neighboring ambassador sent in a response saying, "We concur with Ambassador Smythe's comments," or, "We appreciate what he has said." Some of them wrote to him and said, "We could not have said that, we who are permanent members of the staff. We could not have said it." But once Hugh had broken the ice-

Q: So it's a good thing to leaven the mixture with somebody from outside, especially an anthropologist.

SMYTHE: I think the point is . . .

[End Tape 2, Side 6] [Begin Tape 4, Side 7]

SMYTHE: . . . as to whether you are serious in working there. If you are there for the public relations and it's understood, fine. But if you are there to work and you have a serious attitude, I think they are understanding and appreciative.

Q: For the purposes of the tape, I will repeat what you said, because we were shifting then. You made a very good point that the permanent people-that is, the professional diplomats-seem to make a distinction between those who come in from outside who were in academia, and those who come in from the financial world. There are a great many correlations between academic work and diplomatic work, don't you find?

SMYTHE: For one thing, there is a good deal of in-and-out. Many Foreign Service officers have come from an academic background. In fact, they're more likely to have done graduate work than not to have done it if they have reached a certain level. The second thing is, those who come from outside who are not academic sometimes have a greater adjustment to make, I think, to get at their way of doing things. I found that a great many officers are accustomed to going home and sometimes taking courses at the Foreign Service Institute or serving as diplomat-in-residence or otherwise lecturing to university audiences, so that there is a healthy respect for the ones who are doing some of the intellectual work while they are on the firing line carrying it out.

Q: Also, I think the two disciplines attract similar personalities.

SMYTHE: That's a very good point, yes.

Q: They're going into that quite a bit at the Institute now, and finding that foreign service officers have a definite personality profile. They're introspective and not gregarious and so forth, and that is true also of academic people.

SMYTHE: Right. I have been encouraging young people to take a period of their early career time and try to work as interns or even as junior Foreign Service officers, and see if it isn't a career that they find rewarding.

Q: Is that so? So you see that closeness?

SMYTHE: I see that closeness and I also see the value of the interaction of the analytic and intellectual training and the actual experience on the other end. I don't think we can get too much of that in juxtaposition.

Q: How did the press treat your husband in Syria? Did he have a good press? Were they being pro-America at that time?

SMYTHE: They were being anti-American. If they had an epidemic and they needed-what was it they needed? It wasn't typhus. It seems to me it was cholera. They needed a million cholera shots, and if they got 100,000 from the Soviet Union, it appeared on page one. If they got 1,000,000 from the United States, it appeared on page eight; that kind of thing. Hugh would sometimes call that to their attention and even tease them about it when he was in a group of people who were friendly toward him. But they were very anti-American then, and I must say that we were not as good at interacting with Arabs as we became later, I think.

There was in the United States a feeling, while we were pretty close to the founding of Israel and whatnot, and at pains to make sure that we indicated our support and concern that the more numerous Arabs around them weren't victimizing this small country, we didn't attempt to see both sides and say to the Arabs something that understood where their worries and concerns were. One of the things that Hugh was able to articulate for the Foreign Service was how it looked to the Arabs when we would make a statement that ignored something that was uppermost in their minds, in defense of Israel. They needed to hear that we were looking at both sides. They could understand that we could side with Israel and that we had a good many Jewish citizens who were close to Israel, but they couldn't understand how we'd ignore the Arab citizens, who were probably as numerous all along, and not show some understanding of their point of view.

Q: Don't you think the United States is still suffering from shock over the [German] concentration camps and what was done? I think that is a great part of the national psyche.

SMYTHE: I think that sense of guilt is very strong. I think, too, sometimes our Jewish friends, in their interest in seeing that we move from here to there as quickly as possible, do not always genuflect at all the altars on the way to make sure that they recognize that there are other elements that we have to pay attention to. I have talked with my Jewish friends very often about their negative response to Jesse Jackson, for example, and I am astonished at how many do not realize that black Americans see Andrew Young as hounded out of the U.N. by Jewish complaints. They have forgotten that or pushed it aside or not recognized it. They really do not understand, and so I sit down and talk at length and with some patience about how this looks to a group of people who are not sophisticated about all the nuances, and some of them have said, "I never knew about that," or, "I never thought about it that way." I think we have the same blindness, the same haste to get an effect, and lack of sensitivity to covering all the problems along the way so that the effect will be more solid when it's reached.

Q: Were the Arabs very much aware of the turmoil in this country at that time? The turmoil over civil rights?

SMYTHE: Only a few, and those were the more sophisticated ones who had been here. I remember long conversations with an Arab attorney about the fact that there just was not a good public relations source on behalf of Arabs in the middle sixties. We said, "We are not for hiring people to plant false trails all over, but you do need to have people tell you how to get some newspaper attention to explain the realities of the Arab position."

When we came back, I remember my husband, who was looked upon as, of course, a liberal New Yorker who understood their position, and he was on the faculty of Brooklyn College, which had a great many Jewish students and faculty members, and they asked him to come talk about Syria. When he talked to them about the Arab point of view and the ways in which we are going to have to find ways of meeting their needs as well as our own and our Jewish needs, they thought he had forsaken them. They thought, "Oh, you're not friendly to Jews anymore," and he had to sit down and explain the great passions. You can't really say you've got to be one way or the other. We have got to make friends with both these national entities, and the Arabs are a very large group of national entities that we cannot afford to forget.

Q: And they have the oil.

SMYTHE: Absolutely. [Laughter]

Q: Were the race riots played up much when you were in Syria in the local press?

SMYTHE: No. To tell the truth, you didn't find much foreign matter of any kind in the Syrian papers, not a great interest, not a great deal of concern.

Q: Was much made of the fact that your husband was a black?

SMYTHE: Not very much. One person said to him, "Why is it you look like an Arab? (You know, there are a great many brown Arabs) You look like an Arab." He had piercing eyes and a habit of talking with his hands, which is very Arab (and very Jewish). "My children look more American than you do," one Arab said to him. And so he would talk with them at length and explain. They didn't find it very surprising. We had a few black Foreign Service officers who had served in Syria. We had a couple while we were there, not at the same time. One didn't succeed the other, but was in the same agency. It was a very interesting thing to have them not know much about the color line and not care much about it, not think too much about it.

Q: Refreshing, actually. In North Africa, they're very aware of it and very, very critical of the US.

SMYTHE: Now, in Cameroon, I had more black officers than most, because we were just starting our experimenting with having two married Foreign Service officers in the same post, and I had two such couples, both of whom were black. This was the first time the Foreign Service had ever had two couples together and the first time it had had that many blacks in this small post in Cameroon.

Q: What did you think of the social life? Did it wear you out?

SMYTHE: Not really. Cameroon was not really as full of social life as Syria was. We counted one year the number of social events we had gone to-800.

Q: Eight hundred events in one year?

SMYTHE: Yes. It was nothing for me to have a coffee to go to in the morning. Hugh would have a luncheon. We might or might not have a dinner, but we surely had a reception, and sometimes two receptions, sometimes a reception and a dinner, and sometimes still another thing.

Q: And the Arabs eat so late at night, too.

SMYTHE: They're not as bad as the Spanish.

Q: At least they go home right afterwards.

SMYTHE: So that wasn't really so bad. We had a lot more entertaining in Syria.

Q: You had a lot to do yourself, planning all that. You could relieve your husband of that entirely.

SMYTHE: Yes. Things were so arranged in the embassy that my staff could get a reception for 300 ready in two days. We had eleven people who could be tapped for waiting on two days' notice without any question, and, of course, if they were supposed to be working for somebody else, they gave us priority, which helped. But we used our gardeners, as well as our household staff.

Q: Did you use drivers, also?

SMYTHE: Oh, yes. And they were delighted. It was a very good source of money, and they were always paid better on a part-time basis like that. It was good training for me by the way, to have that behind me.

Q: Of course. You knew exactly how to do everything. Now, we're up to around 1968.

SMYTHE: 1969, because Hugh left Malta in 1969.

Q: And you were only in and out in Malta?

SMYTHE: That's right. I was there the two summers.

Q: Was that a sort of sleepy place?

SMYTHE: Yes. Not much going on, especially in summer, and it was hot and dry, but it was also a fascinating place, with lots of history, including pre-Christian history. There were some pre-Christian ruins. Prince Charles came to visit both summers I was there, and the second time Princess Anne came with him.

Q: You met them, I suppose, socially?

SMYTHE: Yes. As a matter of fact, it was rather interesting. When the newspaper came out with the news of the royal reception, we had our farewell luncheon for the embassy staff. We were about to leave. Their party had been one day; our party was the next. Maybe it wasn't a luncheon; maybe it was in the late afternoon. One of the girls from the office said, "What did you think of the picture in the paper this morning?"

I said, "I haven't seen the paper. I've been so busy with the party."

She whipped it out, and the only picture of Prince Charles with girls was with Pam and the girlfriend of the prime minister's son. Pam was standing with the sons of the prime minister, and one of them had a girlfriend, so they took a picture of this, and Pam was the one in front. I suppose all of the Maltese women with daughters were fit to be tied.

Q: Did you look on these years as the wife of an ambassador as sort of a holiday from your own career?

SMYTHE: Partly, yes. I wasn't brought up to think of holidays so much. That always runs third or fourth. I saw it as a learning experience, and it was a marvelous learning experience. I saw as much as I could, and Hugh included me in as much official traveling as possible. For instance, if he went to a cheese factory, I went along, and I saw how cheese was made and went through the Wrangler factory with him. They would like to present me with a bouquet or something, and in the case of the Wrangler factory, they presented me with a jacket and pants, which I still have. Hugh was a very active person who didn't like a sedentary life, so when he wasn't doing NATO things or traveling around the country, he was visiting parish priests or factories or something. Toward the end of his tenure, there was a little back-and-forth in the newspapers. Somebody wrote in and said the newspaper didn't seem to have much to write on except the American ambassador. Why did they pay so much attention to the American ambassador? The truth of it was, it was the only game in town. Nothing was happening. He got to be well known, and when he'd visit a village, as our car would go through the streets, people would reach out to shake his hand. I said, "Are you running for public office here?" It was very funny.

Q: You went up to Aleppo, I suppose?

SMYTHE: Oh, yes, many times.

Q: That's an interesting city, isn't it?

SMYTHE: That is, in some ways, more historic than Damascus. Nothing can be more historic than Damascus, but Aleppo has been in continuous use for a longer time than Damascus. I understand they have six or seven layers under the sites we saw.

Q: Yes. Was the dig at Mari very advanced at that time? I guess that must have come in the seventies, where they made that tremendous discovery of all of the clay tablets.

SMYTHE: That was after, yes. Incidentally, I got over to Cyprus and got to see the diggings at Chamonaseki or somewhere in Cyprus, where they had, among other things, a Roman john. It was in the shape of a horseshoe. Do you know, those people must have had twenty toilet seats, and they ran a current of water through. It was a very modern kind of thing. Flush toilets, back in those days. In Syria, in one of the places, they had clay tablets and other ways of keeping records for that town. There were so many things that archeologists could learn from there. I was absolutely fascinated by it. I got into Jordan a good deal on our way to Jerusalem. Every time VIPs came or members of the family came to visit, we'd take them to the Holy Land, and each time we varied the trip a little bit so that my coverage, by the time we finished, was fairly extensive. Well, everybody went through the Dome of the Rock, but not the tombs of the patriarchs, necessarily. My parents, for instance, came and they couldn't walk very far, so they saw just the highlights, but they loved seeing the mosaics that were in Jericho. Mother and Dad enjoyed that part.

Q: You didn't go into Israel, I suppose.

SMYTHE: Not from Syria. We couldn't at that time. I haven't been to Israel since 1962. Now, on that same trip I did go to Beirut. I carried two passports, a personal one and a diplomatic one, and I think I must have used the personal passport to go into Israel.

We were evacuated to Athens [Syria severed diplomatic relations with the U.S., on June 6, 1967 at the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli War]. One couple was attending the air show in Paris, and they came back with no real understanding of precisely where their children were. Our safe haven was Italy, but it was easier to fly people to Athens and dump them and go back and get some more and get them out fast, so those who were going on to Italy had to do a second trip. It must have been a little stressful to be thirteen and not know where your mother was, or to be parents and not know where your thirteen-year-old and fifteen-year-old were. You know, that's very difficult. Luckily, they were pretty well-balanced children and parents and survived it all.

But the odd experiences have never had me feeling as if I'm really in imminent danger. I always felt as if it couldn't be too bad most likely, and so I've had the privilege of having a front-row seat at some of these events and, at the same time, not feel too upset about what was happening to me and mine. When our daughter was safely in Spain, we simply cabled her from Rome that we would be in Rome and to come on to Rome instead of going home to Damascus when school was out. This happened on June 5th.

Q: You were saying, be adaptable. [Laughter]

SMYTHE: Yes. There are dramatic things that happen to all of us.

Q: Have you covered everything you wanted to cover, about Damascus and its effect on you and your thinking?

SMYTHE: I think so. We began understanding by getting to know people. There had been a class system that was no more. Some of the people who had been upper class, the richer people, would sort of cultivate the diplomatic corps. There are a lot of hangers-on, as you well know. We began to understand some of the resentments and some of the complications that are the response of people, but we also were much impressed by the positive end of that, such as the landowner whose land was expropriated from him and given to his tenants, and the tenants came to him and said, "Who's going to lend us money like you used to, to buy our seed?" So he lent them money, because he looked upon them as family. It wasn't all exploitation.

We all tend to interpret things in terms of what we had experienced, and we hadn't experienced that extra human quality that the Arabs have. We found it very moving at times. I find this everywhere, I guess. People are so much more complicated than an easy evaluation of the situation can suggest, but you never get to learn all about people in any short stay. You have to learn more and more. So when I go to Africa people say, "Oh, you've been here so many times. You know all about this." I say, "No. Every time I go to any country, I learn some more that I didn't know before." Because you don't know until you have lived there, and the number of places where we've actually conducted a household is still very small.

Q: When you were in Malta, it must have been when the moon walk took place. Did that make a big impression?

SMYTHE: It made a very big impression. We were sleeping, at 5:00 in the morning, and the telephone rang, and it was somebody asking Hugh for his statement on the occasion of the moon walk, and the moon walk hadn't taken place. Our alarm hadn't rung yet. But since we were awake, Hugh made the statement and then we stayed up until it started and we watched it on Maltese television. It was really something. After that, when the photographs came and we had an exhibit at USIS, there was a great deal of interest in it and a great deal of concern. I got involved because I was part of the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO. I hadn't had to resign that when I went to Syria; I had had to resign all the other things. So I met with the Maltese UNESCO people and had them over to tea, and talked to them about how we saw this as an international event and not just for the United States.

Q: Did you find among the less-educated people, that they couldn't believe that people were on the moon? Did you find any doubts about it?

SMYTHE: No. I don't remember finding any doubts about it, but there was great curiosity, great interest, and we got involved, as embassies so often do, in social betterment things. Our sailors would come ashore, and instead of leaving sailors with nothing to do, we would ask them if they would paint and repair a camp for children or the home for the mentally handicapped and retarded, and so on. A lot of those sailors would come and do these things.

Q: This was the 6th Fleet?

SMYTHE: Yes. The fleet was always in, and if they didn't have things to do, being young men, you'd have someone calling up complaining to the embassy that they left 18,000 beer cans on the beach last weekend, and we'd tell the Navy to have them get out there and clean it up. But if you gave them something to do, they were outstanding.

Q: Whose idea was this to have them paint and so forth? That's a marvelous idea. I've never heard of it being done anywhere else.

SMYTHE: I don't know, but Hugh was having them do it. Every time a ship came in, he had a list of jobs that they could do.

Q: It made goodwill, too.

SMYTHE: It did. And, do you know, there was an orphanage where they were so glad to see these big men—they were bigger than the Maltese—and they would let the kids climb up on them. Of course, many of them missed their little brothers and sisters and enjoyed playing with kids. I remember the discussion over whether they would be able to do something to a stove, a big, old-fashioned wooden stove, that would make it work or whether it would be better for them to try to make a new stove. Anyhow, those ships came in so completely outfitted. I had no idea what our fleet had, and when I found that they even had orthodontists on board to take care of the children in the Foreign Service, as well as other things, and foundries that could make things, you have to take off your hat to them and know that they would be able to survive no matter what happened.

Q: You feel an American presence when that fleet is in, don't you? [Laughter]

SMYTHE: Yes, you do, and I'll tell you something else: the competence of our admirals impressed us. There have to be some bad and incompetent sailors and officers somewhere on the way up, but they certainly weed them out before they get too high. It was exciting to meet and talk with some people who were destined for such leadership.

Q: Did they supply you with any foodstuffs, or were you able to get everything you needed? Sometimes the Navy will do that.

SMYTHE: When we were in Syria, we used to call on the 6th Fleet to let us have as many roasts of beef or whatever they could, and they would.

Q: For official entertaining, yes.

SMYTHE: Yes. I remember when the ships came in, we stocked up the commissary. In Cameroon, we weren't where we could call upon the ships. We weren't even having ships come to Douala as a port of call because Douala had such a short draft that ships had to anchor way out and then come in by cutter or helicopter, I guess, and there wasn't much way of using the ship's visit. But now they've found a way and there have been ships' visits since I left. They've been dredging the harbor, and enlarging the harbor at Victoria, which is much deeper, so it may be that it's coming into another harbor that's farther out.

Q: Do you approve of these visits of the fleet? Do you think it's a good thing?

SMYTHE: It depends on how they're handled. I think a good many Africans are curious about navigation and about ships, and they can be handled militaristically or not. My feeling is that to have a ship put on the kind of show that is possible is all to the good. They know that we're strong. They know that we have ships. And since they come in, to have one that can entertain people as well, is certainly a plus in an area in the tropics where you don't have very much entertainment.

Q: It's a plus, then, if they're not handled militarily?

SMYTHE: That's right. I don't think that it helps us or Africa to emphasize the military or overdo stress on armed conflict.

I have talked with people about the possibility of making Africa a war-free zone and have gotten some very interesting responses sometimes. The president of Cameroon would like it to be that way, but with Chad in the state of civil war, with states which might or might not be friendly on occasion right on their borders, they don't always know how they could get along without armed forces. So they do have a defense force, but they didn't seem to have any bloodthirstiness about going and taking anybody else's territory, even though all of the borders had problems with them.

There were arguments over whether the oil was on Nigeria's side or on Cameroon's side. There could have been questions up near the Chadian area. The Chadians would go through parts of Cameroon to get from northern Chad to southern Chad, and the boundaries were a little at odds with the way people naturally went from one place to another. But there weren't too many out-and-out border disputes and the Nigerian dispute had been more or less settled for the time being, so I suppose if all African boundaries were as settled as those, there wouldn't be much of a problem. But, alas, there are many that are still at issue.

The troubles in the Horn spurted out while I was there. I had a long talk with the president of Cameroon with regard to what countries of goodwill could do that might make a difference, and we didn't come up with any solution that we thought was quick and easy. What we talked about was a possibility of getting sufficient agreement among the nations in the African region so that they could say, "There must not be any war. We've got to stop fighting the other." And how to do that is difficult.

Q: You had a very sort of tumultuous time with this to-ing and fro-ing. Were you PNGed [declared persona non grata], actually, from Syria?

SMYTHE: Not PNGed. They actually broke relations with the United States. It wasn't us; it was everybody.

Q: So the whole embassy had to go.

SMYTHE: Everybody had to go and they said we could leave our most junior officer to clean up. Hugh said, "Our most junior officer can't do it. He doesn't know what needs doing. We need our admin officer." So they agreed to let him stay.

Q: Who took over our interests in Syria?

SMYTHE: The Italians. Hugh took the flag with him when the embassy was evacuated, and the Italian flag went up before US personnel departed. We had known the Italian ambassador well enough and long enough. He was there the whole time we were there, so that the arrangements were not difficult to make.

Q: How do you decide who's going to take over your interests?

SMYTHE: I am not sure how that is decided.

Q: Sometimes it's the Swiss, but they charge more. I've been told they charge more. [Laughter] They've made a business of it, haven't they?

SMYTHE: I suspect what was done required some negotiations at the site, but also back in Washington. I don't really know how it's done. I had gone a day before the expression of unrest. I left, and, you know, it's one thing we never talked about.

Q: Then you had the experience in Malta of being back and forth. You must have felt very unsettled. Do you then try to get into a settled atmosphere again and go back to your school?

SMYTHE: Pam and I were back in our own apartment the last year before Hugh came back, and we stayed there until he died, shortly after I was sworn in as ambassador to Cameroon. I left our daughter in our apartment, and left the title to her. We had a house in Connecticut, and after Hugh died, I put it up for sale, because it was much too large for one person, and sold it while I was in Cameroon. Then, when I came back, I came to Washington, not to New York or Connecticut, and that's when I bought an apartment here, and later took this one.

Q: What made you decide to come here afterwards?

SMYTHE: I was asked to return as deputy assistant secretary of state.

Q: Then we are just about ready to hear about your being nominated ambassador in your own right.

SMYTHE: That's right. I was working at the Phelps-Stokes Fund In 1969, when Hugh came back, I gave up the work at the New Lincoln School and went to work for the Phelps-Stokes Fund in New York. I had been there for six years, interrupted by one year, 1973-'74. I went to work for Phelps-Stokes January 2, 1970. I had also been a consultant with Encyclopedia Britannica since 1969 and continued until '73.

Q: On economics?

SMYTHE: On a variety of things, chiefly how to make the products acceptable from a black point of view. I was working with the Encyclopedia Britannica Educational Corporation, which we called EBE. The first job was to go over a history they were preparing. They were doing a history that purported to bring in the minorities in the United States, and they thought they'd have six or eight or ten minorities coming in. They ended up with 132, because there are national groups, there are racial groups, there were religious groups, and so on. When that was all done, that meant that we were going to have a little of this, a little of that, to include in the history.

Anyway, I worked on that three-volume series. I would go to Chicago when board meetings were held and hear what the board had to say about things. I would view the educational films, which were a very big part of EBE, and make suggestions, such as that they not have just little blond children in their movies; reflect the kind of polyglot population that we have. [Laughter]

Q: I know. There really aren't that many blonds in America.

SMYTHE: Right. Somebody had just done an analysis of the Dick and Jane readers and found that 78 percent of the people who appeared in the book were blonds, and out of the rest, only one looked swarthy, and that was an Italian organ grinder. [Hearty laughter] So we started talking about these things and making changes, and it was a very interesting time.

Q: What does the EBE stand for?

SMYTHE: Encyclopedia Britannica Educational Corporation. It would be EBEC, but they called Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. EB, and this just became EBE. I got to know the Bentons, and their son Charles lives in Evanston, so I am still in a way in touch with the family.

Q: You did not go back to the Lincoln School, then? I had understood you to say you were on a leave of absence.

SMYTHE: I left New Lincoln in 1969. I was on leave from 1965 to 1967. I went back and stayed two years and decided fifteen years was long enough and that I had learned what I was going to learn from it and I'd learn more if I went somewhere else, and Britannica seemed very promising. They wanted me to move to Chicago, and I looked at it and thought about it and decided I'd rather be a consultant and stay in New York. By the time I got that together, Hugh was back, and he was going to be in New York, so I went out and dealt with it there in short visits or through correspondence.

It was a very interesting period of time and I enjoyed that, but I ran into Franklin Williams, who was then at Columbia University, and he was becoming the president of the Phelps-Stokes Fund and wanted to have a new Black American Reference Book published. Phelps-Stokes had published a well-received American Negro Reference Book in 1964 or thereabouts. Prentiss Hall wanted a new edition. Frank wanted me to come on board to edit it, and I accepted. I spent the next six years dealing with the project. As terminology and attitudes shifted, we changed the title to The Black American Reference Book. That was the major reason I went to Phelps-Stokes, but Phelps-Stokes didn't have enough money and Prentiss Hall wasn't providing enough advance to fund that much work, so I spent part of my time running some African programs for Phelps-Stokes and organizing exchange programs with Africans. Part of the time I would travel to Africa. About every year I traveled to Africa in the seventies.

Q: All over? All parts of Africa?

SMYTHE: Mostly all over. What I did was to select universities which were interested in exchanges or professors.

Q: Oh, I see, USIA underwrote that.

SMYTHE: We had various other kinds of programs that we were developing. I was working on one that we called PAIR, Preserve African Intellectual Resources. We were distressed when, shortly after one of my visits to the University of Ethiopia, the university closed down. There was no place for professors, and many of them were not in the favor of the current government and left the country. The Ford Foundation and other institutions had underwritten the education of those professors. We wanted them to remain available to higher education in Africa, and so we were trying to preserve those resources by having a professor corps that would go to campuses in other countries that lacked enough African faculty and see if they couldn't be placed temporarily until their own universities could reopen and hire them.

It was a great idea, from our point of view, but it was not as sensitive to the realities as it might have been. The reality was that you can get a European professor and tell him to go home when you have one trained, but you can't tell a foreign black professor to go get lost, when you get a local African trained-not quite so easily. We wanted to be very careful; but it seemed important for us to get some kind of organization to this. The head of the Ethiopian university went with the World Bank, another one became a diplomat, another one went to work at an American university and will never go back, so we saw a dissipation of a program to train professors that had been very carefully thought through.

Q: Well, the political realities take over, don't they?

SMYTHE: Right.

Q: You can't blame people for wanting to leave Ethiopia.

SMYTHE: No, you can't, and what I wanted to do was put them in a holding pattern that would make them available to go back. But there's no question that the interests of the individual and the interests of the institution are at variance sometimes, and I could not justify saying, "Well, you be miserable and unsettled for ten or fifteen years or any unknown period of time, in the expectation that someday they'll need you back and value your services," when he could do well and prosper in an international organization or an American institution.

Q: As a member of a very elite corps, of course he could. You wanted them to be placed until such time as they would go back to Ethiopia.

SMYTHE: Right. We were going to try to put them two years here and two years there.

Interview continues - October 21, 1986

Q: We were talking about your desire to keep these people so that they could then go back to Ethiopia, but there was some reason why you couldn't. Would you like to explore that for me?

SMYTHE: There were several reasons why. Number one, it happened to be a good time for well-prepared Africans, and an academic background was, of course, among the most complete and useful backgrounds available. The head of the university, for example, went with the World Bank, and when he took the position with the World Bank, I said, "There is very little chance that he will go back again and work in that university," and he never has. I haven't seen him recently, but he was still in this country when I was last in touch.

A second thing was, we found less of an assured welcome to professors from other African countries than we might expect from African universities, because it would be easy to Africanize, as they trained their own people, and the Europeans would understand when they were told to return home and leave the positions to Africans. They were not quite so sure that they could do it with brother Africans, especially if they had taken them in in an asylum kind of capacity. It would be more difficult to send them packing.

The third thing is that, just as there are ethnic rivalries in any one African country, there are ethnic rivalries among them. While you sometimes find people on both sides of the border with a common cultural background, the farther away from home they get, the more likely they are to be ethnically different and therefore not as easy to fit into the culture as a common Western culture might be. So there were various subtle influences that made people reluctant to go with the refugee professors.

Q: Did you also say you had trouble funding?

SMYTHE: We had trouble funding. We needed to have a base. It would have required some sort of secretariat in Africa, some sort of asylum procedure that would have channels open to the various countries. There would have had to be travel funds. Many of the professors had to flee without taking their financial resources with them, and some had very few financial resources or very small resources, so money was needed. All the people who knew African countries, and especially people who had funded the training of African scholars, understood what our objectives were, but it came at a time when budgets were being cut. There was a sense of loyalty to things already in the pipeline, and the disposition to take on something new and different was not overwhelming.

Q: Timing has a great deal to do with these things. For how long did you keep working on this?

SMYTHE: Well, that was one of sidelines. I had a whole clutch of grants for exchanges of professors between American institutions and African institutions. I was working on a plan to enrich the experiences of black students in white universities. Many of these were not accustomed to a white environment, and they felt a little beleaguered. The white environment had relatively few black professors. They were in great demand. But, at the same time, there were not a lot of them who had all of the credentials and who were not already placed, and so there was a shortage of black professors. They were raiding the black institutions to get them, and I was trying to set up a core group of distinguished scholars and people who might not be so distinguished but who showed great promise, and circulate them around these institutions so that black students could have at least temporary role models and know something more about the prominent scholars that were available. This took a good deal of time and attention. I was working at publishing *The Black American Reference Book* until it was published in 1976. There was a great part of my time going to that.

Q: I can imagine that must have been very time-consuming. You edited the whole thing?

SMYTHE: I edited the whole thing and co-wrote two of the chapters, so it amounted to a bigger effort than it might have been. In the middle, I was trying to do other things, such as visiting the institutions overseas to acquaint them with the possibility of inviting a scholar to spend a quarter in Africa and sending one of their scarce African professors to spend a quarter or a semester in the United States.

Q: This was the big explosion of African studies on campus, and you didn't have enough prepared people for it?

SMYTHE: No, this had nothing to do with African studies. The black institutions were not able to have African studies programs full-blown, and, as a matter of fact, there were very few. There were about a dozen in the entire United States, and those were mostly in major universities: The University of Michigan, Boston University, Columbia, Stanford, Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois, and Northwestern, and Michigan State. Not the University of Michigan; it was Michigan State that had the larger one. Yale had one, but it was a little younger than some of the others, not as fully grown, and Berkeley. Those were it. There were very few of them.

Howard University got one, but it was the only black institution with a fully developed program in African studies. The professors were coming to serve in all sorts of fields. For instance, we had a professor from Niger who went to Morehouse College in Atlanta as a French professor, and he was a tremendous success. He had done his Ph.D. in the United States, so he understood English well, and he was a natural teacher, very, very good, and a scholar to boot. He really was into writing and research, so that he was one of my great successes. Then there was a professor from the University of Khartoum who came over and disappointed us by leaving early because he was appointed dean of the graduate school at his university and had to go back. But it shows you the caliber of people that we attracted.

Q: This was just to acquaint people in the United States-

SMYTHE: With the reality of African scholars. And for them to see and talk with and understand African scholars put a little more reality into their perceptions of Africa. Many of them had quite romantic notions, and, frankly, children in the United States, young people in our colleges and universities, had strange notions. For instance, one of them said to me, "I'm studying Swahili because it's the basis for all African languages." I said, "Whoever told you that?" Another one thought that the dashiki was the prevailing garment in Africa and that the Afro hairstyle was common in Africa. There were all sorts of misconceptions, so we had an interest at Phelps-Stokes in getting people to understand the reality of what Africa was and get it out of these often romantic, imaginary concepts.

One other thing: In order to get the black colleges and universities interested in Africa, we had a program funded by the Office of Education, its international bureau, to take a group of presidents of black institutions to Africa. We took twelve presidents. One was replaced by a trustee at the last moment, but twelve institutions were represented. We took them to five countries in Africa, and what we were trying to do was show them how very different they were, one from the other. We went first to Liberia, where there was a conference of the International Association of University Presidents, and they met presidents of other universities around Africa and got to see Liberia and to understand something about its program and concerns. We had about a week in each country. Then a week in Nigeria, and we took advantage of everything. We got bumped off a plane and had to stay overnight in Ghana, so at 11:00 at night we chartered taxis and went sightseeing around Accra, because we were leaving in the morning. I personally took a group of them to the university at Legon so they could see what it was like and view the colonial model of the university. We also went to Kenya, Ethiopia, and Morocco and visited their institutions.

Q: You certainly picked different ones.

SMYTHE: That was our objective. We were invited to come to Somalia by a friend of mine, Fred Hadsel, who was then ambassador to Somalia, and I was not able to accept. I didn't get there until 1985, in fact. But the vast differences made a great impression on the group, and the fact that there was such a difference in their art, in their languages, in their customs, in the roles of women-so many things were different. It was a valuable summer, and since then the Phelps-Stokes Fund has sent a number of faculty groups to Africa. We were not able to continue taking the presidents until we had taken most of them, but we were able to get grants to take the teachers, and we who went are still involved with the participants. I'm not officially connected now, but I just got a letter on Monday inviting me to participate in one that's being done by a group of Maryland colleges and universities, to be the leader of that group, and I plan to go.

Q: Do they take any whites at all?

SMYTHE: Yes. Last year I took a group which included one of my colleagues at Northwestern. But in the teachers' groups, there have been more than that. In fact, two or three of the colleges that have participated are predominantly white. One is a Catholic institution in Tennessee, and one of the sisters was a very enthusiastic participant. Phelps-Stokes helped organize an Indian consortium of colleges, and two of the participants were Indian professors, so that there has been this greater diversity. But last year was the first time for Northwestern to participate, and that was because I was there and they knew me, and so on, and one of the Northwestern staff went and enjoyed it thoroughly. The whole Civil Rights Movement, because it was reinforcing a sense of blackness and a sense of belonging to something, in a sense needed to exclude whites who had been helping to fight the civil rights battle at that time, and we badly need to restore the sense of relationship with people who understand and sympathize with the cause.

Q: Do you feel it went too far, this alienation?

SMYTHE: I don't know that it went too far. I think it was inevitable. You know, people like you and me have been able to communicate for many a year, but there are a great many first-generation college students who don't have the background of parents who have known people across racial lines, and many of them felt really very isolated on "white" campuses. I didn't understand this fully until I read a letter in an Antioch publication from a white mountaineer who had gone to Antioch as the first member of his family to go to college. He said, "I found when I got here that the only people who really understood where I came from and what I thought like were the black students; and now that they are in black organizations, that leaves me without anybody to talk to." I suddenly realized it is not just a race thing; it's a matter of class. And it's also a regional thing. There are certain Southern customs and foods and ways of doing things that are not understood elsewhere.

We have to get away from the isolation. We need both. We need to educate people in the fact that there are diverse cultural backgrounds and diverse things that various cultures can contribute, but we do need to get back to reinforcing our common agreements, the things that make us a nation. I was very sympathetic to the movement for bilingual education, but I think that if we let go of a common language and make people feel it's all right not to learn English, we will have lost a terribly important human value: common understanding.

I was working for a time on the possibility of bilingual teaching of reading and even applying it to what was then called "black English," the patois that's spoken by a good many less-educated people, so that children would not have to grapple with a different way of phrasing things while they were also decoding. I was a consultant for Encyclopedia Britannica then and so was Clifton Fadiman, who was in the office one day when I was there, and I said to him, "I've come across the psycholinguistic readers that they want to use in Chicago. What do you think about this?"

He looked it over and he said to me, "If you knew how hard I worked to come by this good English that I have, when my father had a Polish accent and my mother had one, and I wanted so much to learn how to speak really well. I think you're selling them short. You don't encourage them to want to learn English really well." I was much impressed by that.

Q: Well, there's no place in the job market for them if they don't. Really, it's just basic as that.

SMYTHE: If they can't deal with English, no matter how creative and happy they've been using their own basic language-

Q: You don't say they have to give it up.

SMYTHE: No! They certainly don't.

Q: It's an enriching thing, I should think. But I agree that you would be selling them short.

SMYTHE: Yes, and I'll tell you who told me that first. I went to Harlem Prep to talk with some of the students about this idea. I had a foundation grant for looking into the possibilities of bilingual education for black children, seeing their own way of speaking English as a separate language. So I talked to some seniors at Harlem Prep School, which is an alternative school, privately organized and sponsored for school dropouts who had been turned off by the public school curriculum and had decided to stop going to school. Somebody started this school, which had a great deal of latitude for individual arrangements. The Urban League sponsored it. They lured in some high school dropouts who felt that they could probably return to education if the school was different and more flexible.

So I got a group of these seniors around me and I passed around the psycholinguistic readers and explained what they were about and why they said children would learn to read faster if they were able to read these books. I showed them that there was one book in what they called "everyday English" and one book in what was labeled "school talk." They had the same illustrations, and the everyday English said, "My grandmama, she cook greens," and the other one says, "My grandmama cooks greens," that kind of thing. He said, "Well, you know, all of us look at television. We know what English is spoken in the United States. We don't have to have a special thing to tell us this kind of English. We don't have to have help in decoding this English."

Q: They don't want to be patronized.

SMYTHE: That's right. I said, "Would you like your little brother to start this way and then transfer to another way?"

He said, "What kind of job is my little brother going to be able to get when he gets out of school if he gets stuck in this and he doesn't make the transfer to the other English?" And this was a kid who had been a fifteen-year-old dropout, now a senior in high school.

Q: Has this bilingual attempt been pretty much dropped?

SMYTHE: I think it may have some leftover interest here and there, but I don't know. I haven't encountered it since then. At the time that I saw these psycholinguistic readers, I sort of thought if the idea catches on and it seems to work-and they claim that it did in the Chicago group that they tried it on-I thought surely it will catch on like wildfire all over the country. But I haven't encountered it again and I haven't been working with that for some years, so I shouldn't even comment at all.

Q: It seems to me one of the problems with that sort of thing is what's happened very often in the bilingual approach with Spanish students. The teachers have such a vested interest in keeping their jobs that they don't get them out of the other language, and they are condemning the child.

SMYTHE: I was worried about another thing. I grew up not speaking black English, and if I walked into a classroom and said, "Ain't you did your homework?" they would know me for the phoney I would be. It really would be patronizing. I just couldn't see how we were going to implement that, and I talked with a number of people who said the problem is, if you really teach people to speak standard English, they can't really go back and forth all that easily. We evolve in such subtle ways that we aren't even conscious of some of the changes that take place. Anyway, it was a very interesting hiatus.

Q: Well, we're rapidly approaching 1976. In fact, we've gotten to 1976, when President Carter was elected. How soon after that did he select you to be one of his ambassadors?

SMYTHE: I was at a meeting in suburban Virginia, a Washington-area meeting. One of the Phelps-Stokes programs was having its meeting, and I was on the program. I came to Washington and when I returned to my hotel one evening, there was a telephone number to call and a Mr. Vance had telephoned. The only Mr. Vance I could think of was Cy Vance. [Laughter]

Q: Did you know him before?

SMYTHE: I knew his wife. I had met him, but she and I served on the board of the New York Urban League together, so I knew Cy Vance much better. She had had an affair at their home and he had come in and shaken hands, so I knew who he was and had heard him speak.

Q: This was right after the inauguration, was it?

SMYTHE: No. This was in February of 1977. Now, I had had a rough winter. The book was published in 1976. I was working full blast on it. I remember working on the index in Connecticut in August 1975, and someone telephoned me: Sam Adams, who used to head the AID Bureau for Africa. Sam needed to have some research done on Southern Africa, and so I signed on to do some of it and worked with him and worked very hard, and in October I was to leave to go to Africa. Now, the program on which I was going to Africa was a combination. I was ultimately to get to South Africa and meet with the USSALEP [U.S.-South Africa Leader Exchange Program] group and see the black colleges for South African black students. I started in Sierra Leone and Liberia and went down the coast. I was in Ghana on election day. I wasn't able to stay and watch them put up the election results, but they were all keyed to doing it and were going to do it the next day, but I had to fly to Kenya to go on to South Africa.

I wasn't stopping in Kenya, but they knew that I was coming, and one of my old acquaintances from USIA who was stationed in Ghana met me at the airport and said, "I'm going to take you to my house, because your plane doesn't leave for five hours." So we went home and he said, "I have some news for you. Your husband is in the hospital." So I called our family physician and asked what this was, and he told me, "Well, you can rest easy now. It's all over and done with. Call me in twenty-four hours and I'll give you a report and then we can talk about where you'll go." So I tried to call my daughter, and she was out. It was during the day. But I did get my doctor and he was reassuring and said, "I would have worried you with it, but I didn't know where you were. But now I can tell you he's okay."

I went on to South Africa that night; arrived there in the morning. The woman meeting me was the ex-wife of a physician, and I was still ruminating over this. I said, "I don't know how long I can be here because my husband's in the hospital. There's supposed to have been a notice sent here."

My daughter had sent me a telegram. This telegram said he had had a colostomy, and when I told her, she said, "Oh, that's serious."

I said, "I'd better get home." So, instead of seeing anything, we worked on getting me home, and I got out on an evening plane. She was very understanding. She took me to the airport and we had dinner in the airport. She said, "Now you don't have to stay up and eat dinner on the plane." She had gone to her druggist and gotten some-not sleeping pills, but something that would relax me-and she said, "You'll be able to sleep. If you can sleep all the way, you'll be able to function better when you get there."

So I slept almost all the way, and when I got to the airport, my brother was there with Pam. They took me in, and the first thing I did was to call the doctor. He said, "Come to my office first," and gave me the news that it was cancer, that they had not been able to get it all. Hugh would undergo chemotherapy, and if we were reasonably lucky, he had a couple of years yet.

So I hung onto the "years" and I went in to see him. He was feeling cheerful enough. He didn't know how bad it was, and for awhile he gradually improved. Long before my appointment was announced, he had gained enough weight and barely enough energy so he had gone back to work. He was on the faculty of Brooklyn College. The second semester, he was at the Graduate Center of New York City University, and he didn't have to go all the way out to Brooklyn. By the time they announced my appointment, on April 25th, he was doing better so far as the public was concerned, but he had started his downward spiral. He was getting sicker and sicker and losing weight all the time. He couldn't keep food down. A week after my appointment was announced, he went into the hospital for the last time and lived less than eight weeks. They attempted surgery again, but the cancer had spread; so they couldn't do anything but close the incision. It was really a very difficult time.

But, you know, he took so much interest in my briefings and whatnot. He wanted me to go to Washington and come back and report to him on who had said what, and so I would do this. I would go down on Monday morning and come back on Friday afternoon, and in between I kept in touch by telephone. For the first three or four weeks he was there, I was still at the Phelps-Stokes Fund in New York. I had gone to Washington and had been passed by the Foreign Relations Committee, but I was postponing the swearing-in. He said, "That's foolish. You don't get on the payroll until you're sworn in. Go get on the payroll." So I set a time for swearing-in, and I left him on, I think it was, Thursday. I went to Washington on Friday for the swearing-in returning that night to report to him. Mount Holyoke had offered me an honorary degree, and that Sunday I went to Mount Holyoke, for the ceremony, but in between I came back and spent a day in New York.

Q: He was in the hospital all this time?

SMYTHE: He was in intensive care. He went in on May 2nd. I passed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the 5th of May. I was sworn in on May 27th, and he died on the 22nd of June, so he lived merely a month afterward. And after the surgery, except for the last three days, he was in intensive care, so I couldn't stay but ten minutes at a time, but I could get in to see him every two hours.

Q: What stress you must have been under!

SMYTHE: It was a real strain, and it wasn't possible to do anything useful like planning ahead. I would go to my office and work for a couple of hours. I could come in for ten minutes every two hours, and luckily my office was on the west end of 87th Street, before Central Park. It was on East 87th, but less than a block from Central Park. He was on the extreme east end, right across from Gracie Mansion, in Doctors Hospital. So I'd work for a couple of hours and dash down for ten minutes, and I also organized my work so I could carry work and sit there and do it and go back and just hand my secretary stuff that had to be typed and go back and create some more.

We knew that I was leaving the Phelps-Stokes Fund. They were planning on a reception for me and that sort of thing. But it was an unreal time, and I could do no preparation for a departure or anything. For instance, I didn't shop for clothing until well after he had passed away, on June 22nd. There were just so many things to do.

Q: I don't know how you possibly did it. How in the world were you able to keep yourself cheerful for your husband's sake?

SMYTHE: I wasn't getting any training in Washington to speak of except French. I was an Africanist, in a way, so that some of the information that I would normally have been given, was already in my possession. I had already done the diplomatic wives' briefing course when Hugh was an ambassador, and people were very understanding. But it was an unreal time of my life. I'll tell you; I don't quite know how I managed the whole thing. How ironic to have this pinnacle of your life come with the nadir!

My daughter Pam was a marvelous help. She's a creative sort, and what she did was to do hospital duty all week. She was working as an office temporary and she could work or not work as she chose, and so she just chose not to work while I was away. She would think of things that he might like and take him things to read and so on, and he adored her and was proud of her and pleased that she was so solicitous of him. He was a remarkable patient. At the memorial service, one of his nurses came up to me and said, "You know, the night before he died, I was struggling with my homework, and he said, 'What are you working on?' I explained, and he said, 'I can help you with that.' Can you imagine? He was, in effect, starving to death because his body couldn't process his food well, and he was still looking out for me." He was quite a teacher. I got some of the most beautiful letters from his former students.

Q: A tremendous personality, I've been told, who made a great impact.

SMYTHE: A very strong person who had always taken it upon himself to help people who needed help, because people had helped him when he was a poor boy; he had sold newspapers when he was a small boy. He felt that people had taken an interest in him and helped him to move up, and so it was his duty to do the same thing for other people, and he got a real charge out of it.

Q: That's wonderful. Well, you must have done some preparation for the Senate hearings, didn't you?

SMYTHE: You know, I really did mostly coasting on what I knew. I came to Washington that day. They had collected some materials on Cameroon so I would know the form of government and the history and so on, but it was easier for me, having worked with Africa so much, to talk about the problems and the possibilities. I was not well acquainted with our current AID programs, but I had read enough and talked with enough people in the Department so I had some specifics, and I'd even met some of the members of the staff then. Several members of the staff, who were about to leave, came by to call on me when I was in the State Department, and they were very helpful.

Continuation of interview: April 14, 1988

Q: We were talking about your Senate confirmation hearing, and I wondered if you could go into a little more detail on that, who was on the committee, and so forth.

SMYTHE: As I recall, Nancy Kassebaum was chairing the committee. Present were Senator Pell from Rhode Island, the senator from Alabama. Who else? There was a third, in addition to Senator Kassebaum, I believe.

Q: Wasn't there something special about the Alabama senator?

SMYTHE: Yes. He asked only one question. He wanted to know where was I born. Clearly, he wanted to get it on the record that I was born in Alabama, and we had a chuckle over that. [Laughter] It was the first time in U.S. history that three black ambassadors had come up before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, I think.

Q: So this is really quite an historic occasion.

SMYTHE: They were so busy with examining Wilbert Le Melle, who was going to Kenya, that they gave relatively less time, I think, to Ulric Haynes, who was destined for Algeria, or me. The examination took a good while because there were three of us, but it was not difficult or antagonistic in any way.

Q: Can you recall any of the questions they asked you? Were they on the economy and the political situation?

SMYTHE: They wanted to know something of the nature of the country and what sort of interest the United States might have in it.

Q: Did Senator Kassebaum ask you many questions? She's very interested in Africa, I know that. That's her specialty.

SMYTHE: She is, but I think this was before she became as interested as she now is, and I don't remember any very special line of questioning.

Q: All of this time, of course, you were going through a personal ordeal with your husband. What was his attitude toward this?

SMYTHE: I think it gave him a kind of something to live for. Each time I came back from Washington, he would want to know whom I'd seen and what kinds of questions they had asked and what kinds of briefing I was getting, and he wanted to be sure that I talked with someone who could give me the proper background on a number of things. He knew he was terminally ill and had even talked about the fact that he would prefer to go quickly rather than linger a long time, but he was not yet completely helpless. He could still get out of bed and go to his chair. After a while, he knew that postponing my swearing-in in the hope that he could be there was not practical, and so he insisted that I go and get on an official basis as the ambassador-designate and start putting in more time in Washington. So on the 27th of May, I was sworn in, but until then I had been holding it up, hoping against hope, as one does, that the news would be better than I knew it to be.

Q: So his attitude was one of great pride and helping you as he could?

SMYTHE: He was proud. He was interested in helping me. He had always prided himself in pushing me in the direction of achieving what I could achieve, and it gave him something positive to work on and to think about.

Q: The timing was very hard from your point of view, but it couldn't have been better from his, could it?

SMYTHE: Right. He was in intensive care at this time. It wasn't just that he was in the hospital.

Q: Imagine that! And when you had your swearing-in, of course he could not come to that.

SMYTHE: He could not be present and I could not trust myself to mention his name that day.. He wasn't released from intensive care until the 20th of June, and this was nearly a month before that. I had called my cousin in Atlanta, who is a physician, and had told him about developments at the hospital, and he said to me, "Mabel, he has only three to four weeks to live. Ask to talk with his doctor and tell him to make Hugh comfortable and to stop doing things that would be uncomfortable for him." But his surgeon was not inclined to stop the hopeful messages, and he kept saying, "In ten days we are going to get you out of the hospital." That completely confused me. Of course, one hopes to take the more optimistic of the two prognoses, and that's the way I kept hanging in there, thinking that he might be getting better, at least temporarily.

Q: When you had the swearing-in ceremony, you had your daughter with you?

SMYTHE: My daughter came. She had been very supportive throughout his illness, and whenever I was in Washington, she was at the hospital all the time, going up to see him every two hours for five minutes and that sort of thing. She held the Bible, and when they asked me to introduce my family, I completely forgot to introduce her, thinking of her as part of me. It was a very interesting thing. It never occurred to me that I should introduce her. I thought everybody should know we were one family.

Q: Who administered the oath?

SMYTHE: The oath was administered, I believe, by Talcott Seelye, and the presiding member of the State Department was Warren Christopher, who was that day acting secretary of state.

Q: You had a large group, didn't you?

SMYTHE: I had quite a group, because I had a large family and there were so many people who had helped me on my way, and some of them felt supportive in other ways. I had tended to be associated with institutions, and you don't select one person from an institution; there are always several. So I had some people from the New Lincoln School family, some parents and children from the school, I had schoolmates, I had people who had worked with me at the Phelps-Stokes Fund or who had known my husband or someone else, so that there was quite a large group.

Q: Can you give us an estimate of how many people were there?

SMYTHE: They told me about three or four hundred.

Q: And you say Warren Christopher spoke?

SMYTHE: Yes.

Q: And the ambassador of Cameroon was there?

SMYTHE: He was there. Ambassador Bindzi and I had gotten acquainted, interestingly enough, well before the swearing-in. He had come to the Phelps-Stokes Fund when I was vice president there to tell me of some of the needs of the University of Cameroon, so that we had a background, and it gave me an additional contact with him before he knew anything about the prospect-before I knew of my impending assignment to Cameroon.

Q: Your specialty of education is certainly a necessary element. no matter where you go in the world, isn't it? It always gives you entrée.

SMYTHE: I get more credit for a specialty in education, but I was not an education major. My doctorate is in economics. But I was so interested in education. My father was a college professor, and I was born across the street from the college where he was teaching, so that I grew up on campuses.

Q: It's in your blood. [Laughter] Well, I think every ambassador has to be a bit of a teacher, don't you?

SMYTHE: Absolutely. It is a great convenience to be able to communicate in terms that enable another person to see what you're driving at.

Q: In the sequence of events, you were sworn in on the 27th, but your husband was still terminally ill. Obviously, everything had to wait on that, didn't it? Dreadful!

SMYTHE: I think he was well aware there was no hope. He insisted that I go ahead because my official briefings could not begin until I was sworn in and he knew I needed all of the briefing that would be provided, and we didn't want to maintain an empty seat in Yaoundé over too long a period of time. So my family rallied around. Both my sisters and my brother were there, along with my remaining uncle, my mother's only surviving brother.

Q: The one who died at eighty-something?

SMYTHE: Eighty-four; yes. He was about eighty then, and he came to the swearing-in. And a number of my friends, some of whom I hadn't seen in some years, came to the swearing-in.

Q: So it was a rather bittersweet thing, with a lot of good about it.

SMYTHE: They felt that I should be cossetted and protected. Many of Hugh's friends were there. People who had served under him in Damascus came out, and people who had served in Malta under him came to the swearing-in, so I felt very good about the support that came.

Q: This is a very unusual experience to have been an ambadress and then become an ambassador. Very few have switched roles like that.

SMYTHE: We were only the second married couple in American history, both of whom served as ambassadors. (The first were Ellsworth Bunker and Carol Laise.)

Interestingly enough, that was a good part of my upbringing. In briefing for the post, I knew something of the roles in embassies and I certainly had to learn a good deal about protocol as hostess in the embassy.

Q: But you already knew that through being the wife of an ambassador.

SMYTHE: Right. Because I had been a member of the Advisory Commission on Educational and Cultural Affairs, I had had an international role myself. I had had a diplomatic passport for five years before I went to Damascus and had maintained one for sixteen years before I went to Cameroon. But, as one of my advisors told me, my new diplomatic passport carried a great deal more weight than my old one. [Laughter]

Q: Was it rather frightening? Since you were the wife of an ambassador, you knew what was involved in this job.

SMYTHE: Yes, but remember, ten years before, even though we were in Damascus where four months after we arrived there was a coup and I could hear the shelling of the president's palace, there was not quite the same aura of danger in the embassies. At that time, Syria was a special case. It was not considered a run-of-the-mill embassy. Cameroon, in terms of security, was run-of-the-mill. No one saw that as a place that had been targeted for destruction, or of special problems. It was not until we began-in 1979 the Iranian students seized the embassy [in Tehran]. I was in Cameroon when our Ambassador to Afghanistan was seized and then killed. Ambassador Dubs. So the rising insecurity of embassies had not caught up with me when I went to Cameroon, in spite of Syria, which we knew was a tough spot. So I went feeling relatively safe, and it was after I was there that we began stepping up embassy security and learning how to deal with the special concerns of terrorism abroad.

Q: How soon after your husband's death did you actually leave, Mabel?

SMYTHE: He died the 22nd of June, and I remained for two months. I had been scheduled to leave about the 1st of July, and if he had progressed, I was hoping to take him for a convalescence in Africa. When he passed away, I remained behind for an extra two months and got his affairs a little bit more in order. I had to accomplish a great deal. I had to work night and day during that period of time, and, unfortunately, in the transition to Africa, some of the messages which came in got into a parcel which was missent into storage. I didn't see it again for five years, because I went to Washington from Cameroon and stayed there for a while and then to Northwestern, and I didn't unpack all of my things until 1985, '86. Suddenly, I realized there were additional people who had sent letters of condolence. (I remember staying up all night one night in June writing letters of response and thanks and appreciation to those who had attended him in his illness.) Letters continued to pour in, and I had that additional batch to look after and never got hold of them again until years later.

I explained to as many as I could. In some cases, I had no way of getting to them. They represented institutions that had gone out of existence, and that sort of thing. It was a distressing thing.

Q: How did this affect you physically? Grief is such a physically debilitating thing anyway, and then to have all this added strain, I really don't see how you did it.

SMYTHE: I think that that was what saved my sanity, having a new palette to paint on, having new responsibilities, and complete removal from the old site of all the recent stresses. I put my affairs in the hands of some trusted advisors and went away and started dealing with other things, and that helped a great deal. I was in good physical condition. I was very tired, but I stopped on my way to Cameroon for two days in Liberia and did practically nothing but rest to catch up with my sleep. And when I reached Yaounde, they were not able to have me present my credentials. It was Ramadan, and the president would not return to the capital until after Ramadan was over, and then I could present my credentials. This was a blessing in disguise. I had a chance to catch up; I had no social engagements; I was not officially there. I could not receive people officially, so, therefore, I had no stress on me. I could take my time working within the embassy, and this was a great boon.

Q: It must have been, yes. You just weren't anywhere, you were in limbo.

SMYTHE: I was nowhere. It was very funny. The residence could be used for an affair, but I could not appear.

Q: And you couldn't go to any functions?

SMYTHE: No.

Q: Because you just weren't there.

SMYTHE: That's right. [Laughter]

Q: What did you see as the most important part of your job when you went to Cameroon?

SMYTHE: When I went to Cameroon, I saw the most important part of my job building and maintaining good relations, increasing our ability to understand the Cameroonians, fostering their ability to understand and appreciate our point of view. The business of making friends was more important than pushing specific policies. The policies followed the friendship, rather than the other way around, and we happened to have some things going for us that were very useful.

For example, Cameroon was understaffed when it came to research and ability to know where its interests lay in matters such as our position in the General Agreement of Tariff and Trade. We were interested in helping developing countries through giving them advantages in selling to us when they were the chief suppliers of some product or other. Cameroon did not realize that it was our chief supplier of wrapper tobacco for cigars, and as the primary supplier of that, they were in a position to ask for a tariff reduction on their product. We were able to let them know about this provision, to point out that they were, in fact, eligible for a tariff reduction.

There were many times when they were not aware of some other international provision that we could help them understand. They simply didn't have the staff and the people who were trained to do certain kinds of jobs. We saw our role in Cameroon as demonstrating our international friendship in ways that they could see clearly benefitted them, and that would put us in a position to collaborate with them on matters of mutual interest. So identifying those and then pursuing them helped us in establishing friendships.

Q: Do you see the economic give-and-take as the most important way to increase-

SMYTHE: Well, with any developing country, economic development is very close to the top, if it doesn't head the list.

Q: Would you say it's even more important that, say, cultural affairs and exchanges? That's often used as a foot in the door.

SMYTHE: The cultural affairs and exchanges are so often a way of achieving the economic understanding and contact. I first got my diplomatic experience with educational and cultural affairs in helping improve the access of foreign students to the colleges and universities in the United States. I was involved with international students at a time when we were growing in our primacy in technological and scientific training around the world, and people were beginning to see that there was a great importance in getting access to that kind of training. So that it is difficult for me to draw a line between them since I see them as so important to each other.

Q: And intertwined, yes.

SMYTHE: Yes. The whole question of being able to talk with each other depends on this cultural interaction and understanding. Until we have that, we sometimes can't communicate on things which are terribly basic.

Q: You had told me that on your way to Cameroon, when you stopped off in Liberia, the American ambassador to Liberia, who subsequently went to Moscow-

SMYTHE: No, that was not the American ambassador. (I was officially visiting Beverly Carter, who was American ambassador, and in absentia attending a conference in Geneva at the time.) It was the Cameroonian ambassador to Liberia that I got to know during that period of time, who was later sent to Moscow. We had some very fruitful discussions, and an opportunity for informal briefing and his view of what was important between our countries.

Q: Did you find that was particularly helpful to you when you got to Cameroon? Did he offer any insights that you were unaware of before?

SMYTHE: He helped me to round out impressions of Cameroon, and he had an international understanding. The current Cameroonian Ambassador to the United States was francophone. It was more difficult for him to communicate easily in English than for this one, whose "native" foreign language was English, who had gone to English-speaking schools, so that, yes, he did round out my impressions, and it turned out to be a very useful forum. And we talked about Liberia and Cameroon. So often in approaching one country, you can learn from comparisons with another.

Q: Because Cameroon is a bicultural country, isn't it?

SMYTHE: Right. It's a tricultural country (with French, English and at least one African language), and while they're working very hard to make all young children bilingual in French and English as they go through school, it's a very difficult objective to reach, and it will take some time.

Q: You must have had an ongoing and important AID program.

SMYTHE: Very much so, and the AID program was one in which I had a great deal of interest. As an economist, I had been interested in economic development for a long time. The thing about the AID program that particularly appealed to me was that it was in the process of being Africanized, in a sense. We had enacted legislation, thanks to Senator Hubert Humphrey, that required joint action between the host country and the United States' AID program in selecting projects, in carrying them out, and in staffing them, and it was the policy already in our AID program in Cameroon to have a Cameroonian co-director, or even director, so that when the Americans picked up and moved on to another site, the experience of that program would be left in Cameroon with someone high enough in the hierarchy to understand how the parts interrelated. I have sat in meetings in which the Cameroonian experts on health and agriculture and water resources and education and whatever else would sit around the table with the American experts and talk about whether there ought to be catchment dams in a certain place, and they'd look into the incidence of waterborne diseases and whether the dams would exacerbate the problem or whether they would be useful, whether there were countermeasures that could be taken. It was, in some ways, trying to be a model program for our AID agencies around the world.

I had the privilege, after being in Cameroon nearly two and a half years, of taking the assistant director of AID for Africa, Goler Butcher, around to see some of my favorite projects, and she, thereafter, took the world director of AID over to view what was going on there. She told everybody about the importance in Cameroon, and it became something of a showplace, because the projects were being examined very carefully before they were put into place. They were being taken seriously by the Cameroonians and were really addressing actual issues that they saw as problems, so that we were not frittering away resources on show things, but doing something that seemed to be useful.

I remember my favorite project. What was my favorite varied with times and experiences, but at one time when I was going around the north I was particularly attracted to the centers for training young farm families. The reason this seemed so important to me was that it addressed the issue of how you get people on a village level to understand that there are some agricultural techniques that are more effective and bring them greater prosperity. They had tried originally to work with one family from each village. They'd have a center which would be in an area which could reach, say, fifty or 100 villages very easily within ten miles. Well, if this were so, why not take one person from each village? They had tried that and found one person would go back, and if that person didn't have a great talent for leadership, people would say, "We never did it that way," and wouldn't listen too much to one speaker.

So they started taking five to ten families from a village, and then when they went back, if one of them said something, he had several others to back him up. They would take the wife and up to two children to live in the community for a year. They'd see all of the phases of preparing the land and planting and fertilizing and weeding and harvesting. They'd see cultivation, they'd see a spring, they'd see all kinds of flood control or control of insects or whatever, and when they went back, carrying with them a pair of oxen, which they hadn't had originally, and a set of tools and the kind of seed that had been more productive and other things they needed to make a success of farming. If one farm wasn't just right that year, you had several. In general, the average of the farms of people who had had the training turned out to be much more impressive than the average product on the other farms which weren't being cultivated the same way. It aroused a great deal of interest and curiosity, and people didn't have to preach. All they had to do was work and let people see what happened.

Q: People would come with the questions.

SMYTHE: They would come with questions. It was a very exciting thing to be part of. Every year they learned something new, some better way of communicating. One of the things they did was avoid saying, "All right, we've taught you. You're on your own. Go away and we'll deal with other people." Every year they reinforced the training by training additional people. After the first group had gone, they didn't have to take five or six from one village; they could take one or two from this village and initiate some more new villages. So that the system spread and was reinforced each year, and the teachers in the center were charged with going out to the villages and inspecting what was happening and answering questions and consulting with their graduates and seeing whether the trained ones were forgetting something or whether they had run into a problem that hadn't been dealt with at the center, so it was, in a sense, making students out of village farmers and keeping them that way, keeping them in the mind-set that we have something yet to learn, and until we reach nirvana, we will still be learning.

Q: And yet, making them teachers, too.

SMYTHE: Yes. Unwittingly or not, they were teachers. More people came to them, and their children tended to predispose the other children to know more about what life was like outside.

Q: And they would stay a whole year, one complete cycle?

SMYTHE: A whole year. The beautiful thing was that this introduced animal traction. It helped people learn that they could cultivate more land than they had originally been given, because it was presumed they'd have to cultivate with the hoe. Once they got the animal traction, they could do four or five times the land they could have done by hand, and gradually the villages were becoming more prosperous and better able to do things. They were also demanding things. At the center, they had wells and a water supply. There was an experimental center where they were learning something of solar generation of electricity and where the center itself used solar power to light incandescent lights at night, so that they had some lighting at night and some pumping of water, which is a very tedious and backbreaking kind of activity. They were able to draw water and put it in a central place where finding your water, getting your water, would be much easier, so water systems were getting started.

Q: In that part of the world, was it typical for the women to have to get the water?

SMYTHE: Yes. The women were particularly required to carry the water and children carried a great deal of water. Some children I've seen carrying as much as a gallon or more of water were very small, and an orthopedist told me that the compression of those immature vertebrae created some serious problems of child health. They had, of course, invented little carts made out of heavy iron piping joined together with wheels on it, so that when the men carried the water they had these carts. They would put on as much as a small truck could carry and push it by hand, and that would reduce the amount of time required, but it was still backbreaking.

Q: This was taught them at the centers?

SMYTHE: At the centers, they would have access to such instruments and so on, but they were learning some of the shortcuts to managing the water supply, and using water pipes to move water from one place to another, and pumps.

Q: Fascinating! We tend to take all of this for granted, and, yet, in Lyndon Johnson's Texas, when he first came to Washington, that is how they did it there, and the women were always bowed. Somebody was saying that the reason they loved Johnson was, "He brought us the light," and this is what happened to your people.

SMYTHE: All of these things were happening at a time when villagers were just beginning to look beyond their own villages, and they found that if they went to a place where there were new techniques and other ways of learning what was going on in the world, they could communicate to the villages that there was a life out there beyond what they had know. The Cameroonian government was broadcasting material on nutrition, on public health, on a number of other issues, so that even people in the most rural areas could hear by radio some of the things they hadn't seen with their own eyes.

Q: Had they had electricity before?

SMYTHE: They had electricity in the major cities, but in many of the villages, electricity was slow to come by. I don't know that I talked to you about the ambassador's self-help program. I had \$90,000 a year to allocate to small local efforts to do something that would benefit a village, where people would supply the labor and we would buy the materials and make it possible for them to build, for example, a rudimentary dispensary or a community meeting house or something of the sort. One of the things that we funded was simple machinery that would help them save hours. For instance, the women in one village said that they spent so much time shelling the peanuts. There was a former Peace Corps volunteer who had invented a simple machine that would shell the peanuts and the hulls would go out one way and the nuts would come out another, and this would save them time. Instead of spending time shelling these-well, ngusi seeds were something that had to be shelled. Peanuts they could sell before they shelled them sometimes, but they got better prices if they were shelled.

The ngusi seeds were very time-consuming, and those were particularly important because if they didn't have to spend two hours shelling them, they could spend one hour going to a meeting and becoming literate. So there were some literacy classes, there were some classes in sewing, there were some classes in other things that they could attend at a meeting house if they had a machine. So I made a proposition: if they would earn the money for half the machine, we would pay for the other half. So that made our \$90,000 go a little farther and, at the same time, it was not handing down something. They put forth some effort and could say, "We earned this."

A number of these self-help projects went into things of that sort. We would provide the money for all the materials, and they would build latrines for the village or for the school, and this would mean children had a sanitary facility that they would be able to use, and the local people would learn about using such facilities.

Q: And then hygiene can come about.

SMYTHE: Yes. There are so many things to learn, and they can be taken out to the remotest villages by these means.

Q: You said, I believe, that there was a Cameroon director for each one of the teams.

SMYTHE: Each one of the AID projects.

Q: At that center, too, there would be a Cameroonian?

SMYTHE: At that center, the director or co-director would be Cameroonian. If there were not a Cameroonian qualified to do the work, we'd get the nearest thing to it and qualify him by having him work with the qualified person until he knew the ropes.

Q: How was the soil down there? Is it good soil?

SMYTHE: Some of it was. There were many places that were good, and they had identified some places in the center of the country which would be good for raising grain. The land was not all under cultivation at that time. Some of it was just grasslands, but some of it was quite good in quality. There were some parts of the country where it was much too dry and where rainfall was limited to two months a year, and rain was not guaranteed for those two months. It would be scattered. In some years it would be overabundant. Sometimes it would come down in sheets.

The rain that came in torrents would sometimes run off so fast that you needed to have catchment dams or it did very little good. So there were always problems. Africa has a number of climatic problems that we don't really encounter in much of the United States.

Q: Were there many waterborne diseases endemic; for example, bilharzia?

SMYTHE: Oh, yes, there was bilharzia. I think filariasis is tied to-I think the filaria worm grows in water. One of the things that had been suggested was that we put ducks on the ponds that we built, to eat the liver flukes that live in the water, but there are problems with that. That wasn't the answer. That was only one of the suggestions. But there were so many things of that kind that we had to think about.

In the part of the country where there were only two months of rain, sometimes very heavy, we were going to build thirty-five or forty catchment ponds. These would be very small, but they would sequester the water so that the agricultural use of water could be assured. It could be metered out very carefully. But evaporation was going to steal a great deal of the water, because the land gets very hot as soon as the rains are over, so that much of it would be lost by evaporation. They were thinking of how far it would be possible to put a plastic cover or something of that sort over a part of the lake without doing something to the animals that lived in the lake and depended on oxygen from above. So not all the problems could be resolved very easily. Everything was complicated.

Q: But it must have been very rewarding for you.

SMYTHE: Tremendously rewarding, because Cameroon was a country where people were determined to move ahead, and it was a country where Westerners were particularly pleased to see a kind of caution in the way they moved. Unless you have a somewhat conservative approach, much of what you put out is likely to be dissipated before you organize a discipline to use it, and Cameroon had the discipline and the will to use in disciplined fashion, so many things really did pay off.

Continuation of interview: October 23, 1986

Q: How did you manage to keep your household going? Getting back to the post, when you were ambassador, where you had to be the ambassadress, too.

SMYTHE: Well, what happened was that the first month was absolutely dreadful. I was busy trying to get on top of all the names and all the briefings and all the language lessons and whatnot, and to come home for lunch and mediate an argument over whose day off it was tomorrow was more than I wanted. But my marvelous secretary was on the receiving end of my distress one day. She said, "I read something that said that Anne Cox Chambers had an administrative assistant who took care of these things. I will try to find the article, because I thought, 'What a good idea for you!'"

So I went straight to the administrative officer and explained my predicament and said, "What might we do?"

He said, "Oh, that would not be a problem. We'll hire someone, and that'll give us a nice job."

So I made known that I was looking for a house manager, and, quickly, a British woman made known her intent to apply for the job. I said, "Wait a minute. We've got wives who want jobs. Hurry up and get me some candidates so I won't have to insult anybody. I'll just say, 'Oh, isn't it too bad. I didn't know you were interested until I had appointed someone.'"

So we got someone who badly needed a job. She was a librarian and who was delighted to unpack my books and put them in some order for me. She was a bored wife who wasn't sure she liked Cameroon. She had been to only one other post. I found out later she hadn't liked that one, either, but in retrospect it seemed a terribly nice post. After she left, there were people waiting in line to apply, and I never had a problem, except that in the summer of '78 my house manager was going home and I had hired the PAO's wife to succeed her. The PAO's wife was going home on vacation, so I needed somebody in the interim. It just happened that I had invited one of my New York neighbors to come and spend a while with me, and she wrote and said she was coming over to spend as long as we'd like. She was the woman I told you about, who had run a hotel for forty-five years. She came over, and I said, "Nan, you're just what the doctor ordered." She was somewhat uncertain, but she did try it and was a decided success.

Q: People are afraid of protocol, don't you think?

SMYTHE: I told her she needn't worry. We had an officer in the embassy who would brief her on that, and all she had to do was keep the servants straight and see that they cleaned the house and that the meals were planned and so on. She did a perfectly delightful job for me, and I enjoyed having her. At the end of the summer, she accompanied me to Ibiza. Bill Mithoefer had a home in Ibiza. His mother lived there year-round, and they had built a little house for him so he could vacation there with her, and she rented it sometimes. He said, "Would you like to use my little house?" I said, "Yes!" and Nan and I went to the little house.

It was really a two-room, three-room, house-a living-dining room, the kitchen was really a hot plate and a small refrigerator, and a bath and a double bedroom. We had a fine time. She stayed three weeks with me, and we explored Barcelona together and went out to Ibiza and then she went on home from Spain.

Q: Was your daughter able to visit you when you were ambassador?

SMYTHE: No, not in Cameroon. She could have, but I was coming through now and then, and I visited her in London when I would come through. She had a project that she was working on, and I think she rather shrank from the idea. She had an idea of diplomatic life from her sixteen-year-old days when she was in Syria, and she thought she would just as soon skip it.

Q: Did you have a very frenetic social life in Cameroon?

SMYTHE: No, not nearly as frenetic as in Syria. It was lively; I had an American community that was inclined to entertain informally and to do lots of things together, and we enjoyed being together. Everyone was friendly.

Q: I suppose you invited everybody on a rotating basis?

SMYTHE: Yes. I even kept lists of people to know who had or hadn't been invited to the movies at the house and things of that sort.

Q: Did you include the Marines and the communicators?

SMYTHE: Yes. In fact, the Marine ball was held at the residence. I have pictures of that. Many of them were good people who could contribute to many things.

I tended to have focused events, discussions, very often. I worked closely with USIA on that. I was thinking of our conversation yesterday. USIA got, if anything, even more attention than AID much of the time because of its proximity. Its projects were right in our lap, in the same building, and I would very often be part of those or work with them on those or contribute to their thinking on them. For instance, when they did groups, they published a little booklet in French and English that people could read regarding the background of it, what it meant, and how it was received in the United States, and so I wrote a little preface about the significance of those and that sort of thing and took part in the discussion of it. Because of my academic background, I tended to get involved with lecturers who would come over from various universities, perhaps more than might otherwise have been the case.

In a small post, it was important to appear often and to be interested in all kinds of events, such as a meeting of the teachers of English in Cameroon, who wanted particularly to have the British ambassador and me say something about English and its relevance to world development and so on. I had had this experience with the psycholinguistic experiments and other things to draw upon, and I told them a little about our experience with English in the United States in accommodating immigrants who came in with a variety of languages. It was fun in a lot of ways dealing with professional groups, because many of them took themselves very seriously and wanted to underscore the importance of what they were doing. But it was also important for them to understand that there is a light touch, as well, that has to be applied.

I had a chance to follow up on the woman who was-well, she was one of the leaders in the bilingual educational movement and wrote a book on bilingualism in Cameroon and her experience with teaching English as a second language. She was, herself, a Francophone, who had developed an astonishing command of English. She was really very, very good. When she came over here as one of the foreign curriculum consultants to work with a group of colleges in the Phelps-Stokes orbit on how to include Africa in their curriculum and that sort of thing, and I had great respect for her. I saw her again when I was in Cameroon in 1987.

We had a very good connection with the Ministry of Economic Planning, of Economy and Plan, they called it. We had a designated member of that ministry who was an anglophobe and who, therefore, was particularly comfortable speaking English and who had been educated in the United States. Now, we lost him about two-thirds of the way through my tenure there, because he became the first managing director of the Chase Bank Cameroon. Chase Manhattan Bank opened its branch in Cameroon in 1979. I had two conflicts. The first one was that I was invited to a conference in England, which was a sort of think-tank, about "where should international policy be in the next twenty-five years," or something of that sort. It was a Windsor Castle symposium. It was something I would have enjoyed doing. Bob Wade, who used to be our resident minister to UNESCO, was organizing this, and I had worked with Bob when I was on the UNESCO delegation, so that I had planned to go. Then the shooting war began heating up in Chad, and there was a very real possibility that we'd have to evacuate the U.S. embassy in Chad. So I gave up the Windsor symposium, and I didn't know whether I was going to be opening the Chase Bank Cameroon until fifteen minutes before I stepped on the plane.

David Rockefeller arrived that morning, I think, and the president invited us for lunch. Rockefeller was greeted as a chief of state-outriders, all kinds of flags flying, and everything else. He was going to fly to Douala for the opening of the bank after lunch. During lunch, I was passing notes back and forth to a member of the presidency about a plane. We had chartered a Cameroon Airlines plane, and it was waiting in northern Cameroon, in Maroua, with orders to fly to N'Djamena and pick up our people and evacuate them to Yaoundi. The only trouble was, word had come that there was too much shooting; it wasn't possible to have them come. We were waiting to see whether all would clear, and by the time lunch was over, my deputy came to say the shooting was so bad that they had decided to close the airport and there would be no evacuation today. They'd sent everybody home.

So I went down to Douala, stayed for a reception, and took the first plane back in the morning, something like 7:00 in the morning. I went straight from the airport to the embassy and sat down and was looking over my mail when someone came in and said, "We'll have to go back to the airport. They have just landed a plane from N'Djamena. So I went down to the airport, and here was a plane. No one had been allowed to disembark yet because nobody had any clearance or anything; these were refugees. So I got on board the plane, and here were all these people. It was a cargo plane, and they were sitting knee to knee, four rows longitudinally down this plane, of all the American workers in the embassy and some Third Country nationals who worked for the embassy. We had some people from India and we had Peace Corps volunteers. We had everything. I just opened the door and said, "Welcome to Cameroon," and one lady burst into tears.

She was feeling safe for the first time. You see, those cargo planes don't have windows and you couldn't look out and see anything. She didn't know where she was. She wasn't sure. There was a Firestone official who had gone to prospect for setting up a rubber plant somewhere, and he had thought maybe N'Djamena would be a place and had looked it over. He was so happy to be evacuated.

We had already prepared. We had been ready for at least a week. We had worked out our plans when the shooting first started. We had already done a canvass of how many spare bedrooms people had and what would be the procedures if we had to evacuate a planeload, where would we take them for processing, and the answer was the American Club. It was the dry season, so we weren't expecting rain or anything. We had the staff at the American Club all prepared with a menu and everything else that they could prepare-lunch for 233 people, it turned out to be. I don't know that that many were on one plane, but they could do it.

We went to the American Club. There was food for everybody. I took my batch home first. I had two that were staying with me and so they just went in my car, and we took the man from the Firestone place. He went to the hotel. We had already canvassed the hotels and reserved a block of rooms so that the hotel would be ready to receive us. So it went very smoothly. We had even collected surplus clothing in case people needed clothes. Anyone with spare luggage sent it over, and we knew where we could get extra blankets and that sort of thing. It had been worked out very well. We had one of the best young administrative officers in the service, Warren Littrell, who was a thoroughly responsible young man, but he was also very practical and didn't believe in spending any time on unnecessary window dressing.

I had been asked the previous August or September if I would take the deputy assistant secretary slot, and it awaited Robert Keeley's appointment as ambassador to Zimbabwe. All of that took time and they said just don't mention it; they would let me know when it would be time. They let me know in February, and I was gone in three weeks, because I had been waiting and there were a lot of things to do and they had selected my successor by then. I didn't want to have too long a time. My successor [Hume Horan] didn't need to have much language training or anything. He was an Arabist and could function in northern Cameroon with Arabic. He probably had had French in the past, but he had to brush up on it.

He was a career person. He was then a deputy assistant secretary in the consular area. I got to know him and talk with him. One of my predecessors, Bob Moore, had been very kind. He had invited me over for dinner and had invited also all the people he knew from various services who had some interest in Cameroon, and they all helped brief me before I went. I thought that was awfully nice. So I wanted to do the same thing for Hume Horan.

Q: This is skipping back again, but I didn't get your reactions to your very first days. I wonder, can you recall back then? You were under unusual stress at the time. Can you remember how you were greeted and exactly how you settled in?

SMYTHE: I do, indeed. The president was away because it was Ramadan. He had gone to his home village, I suppose, near Maroua. The word was he wasn't coming back until after Ramadan, and therefore I had a month to wait. Not quite a month. I had at least three weeks before he'd be coming back. Meanwhile, I would be in limbo. I couldn't go around in public, and anybody who wanted to see me had to come unofficially in sub rosa.

I had one or two people who came to see me. One of them was very anxious to see me because I had appointed him a Phelps-Stokes visiting professor to the United States, but I had never met him because he had an automobile accident and had to stay home instead of coming. He needed medical care, and we were afraid to risk it. So we promised him another slot if he would postpone, and he did, and I don't think he ever got his other slot. He went to the States, though, but he never got another slot on that particular program.

Anyhow, that meant that I did my public sightseeing in unofficial fashion. My deputy took me around to show me the city. I remember tripping on the stairs. I had some very lovely, but not very practically planned, marble stairs going upstairs in the residence. I came in and was greeted in Douala, because when you come in on a large plane, you don't go all the way to Yaoundi½. They can't land 747s and 767s, planes of that size. I was on a little plane, though. I had taken Cameroon Airlines from Liberia back to Cameroon, but we were supposed to go through customs in Douala. So I got off, and the then-consul had been in Jerusalem when we were in Damascus, and we had met and had some background in common, and he was about to leave. He was due to leave within a month after I came. I just saw him in the airport. We didn't attempt to go home. And I met one of the people from Yaoundi½ who was on his way out, Chuck Croteau, who was the economics officer, and I didn't get to see him again until I was in Morocco in 1982, and ran into him.

My first day, after that little half hour or so in Douala-I guess we were there an hour or so-I went on to Yaoundi½, and the whole embassy was there. Poor things, they had been waiting for me, and waiting, because our plane was very late and we had spent a lot of time in Douala. There was the protocol officer, and I got to meet my present stepdaughter for the first time. She was at the airport among people waiting to greet me. I had heard of her and her husband because they were one of the first husband-and-wife teams both in the Foreign Service. She was USIA, he was a political officer, both on their first tour of duty overseas.

I had heard of her before I left, because she was a public affairs trainee when she went to Cameroon, and she was about to have to take leave without pay because her time had expired, but her husband's tour wasn't over. I remember the recommendation of the DCM that she be given consideration for some other kind of appointment, and they did find another appointment, so she remained for a year and three months after I got there. She left just before Christmas of 1978. Meanwhile, I got to know them very well, because her mother had the same kind of cancer Hugh did. She knew it and was worried about it, and we had quite a bond over that. In the first six months I was there, her grandmother passed away and then her mother died, and her husband's father died before they left Cameroon.

Q: These are the things that are difficult on Foreign Service people.

SMYTHE: Very, very hard.

Q: Because you can't go home for all of these things.

SMYTHE: Well, she did. My first Christmas in Cameroon, I remained. She was worried about her mother and was afraid it might be her mother's last Christmas, so she and her husband just took leave time and went at their own expense for Christmas. The mother lived only about six weeks after that.

That first day, it was interesting to see everybody, and they seemed to be a friendly group.

Q: Is it a large group? Is it a large embassy?

SMYTHE: Not a large group, but as African posts go, yes, because there were about thirty Americans in the AID program; we had a Marine security guard group; we had a Peace Corps group; the largest Peace Corps in Africa at that time, I think. There were five professional staff positions in Peace Corps, and there was USIA with only-I guess they had about five people, too, Americans. And then there were lots of Cameroonians, some of whom came to the airport, too, so that we had a good representation. By the time I invited each of them and their spouses, both Cameroonian and American employees, and third country nationals, and asked each one to bring a Cameroonian friend to introduce to me-this was my first affair at the embassy-I had to plan for 250 people.

I'll tell you the story of that. I had first gone to sub-Saharan Africa in 1957, when you found very few Africans at embassy parties. Even though the countries were independent, there was a tendency for the embassy to relate to the European embassies and for there to be a kind of diplomatic kaffeeklatch atmosphere. One of the things that we had agreed upon before we went out, and that was true not just for African embassies, at our ambassadors' seminar, [Ambassador Smythe attended the briefing course for new ambassadors. Ambassador Anne Armstrong was one of the course leaders. Others in attendance were Lawrence Eagleburger, Rozanne Ridgeway and Arthur Hartman.] was that we were there to relate to the people of the country, to make them know more about us, and help us know more about them. We were not there to become better acquainted with other people's ambassadors. So I started out making one change there, that we would have largely African guest-lists at our parties.

The first party to which I was invited after I arrived had four Cameroonians present, and two of those were our employees. So I sent around a notice that we were there to make links with the country. We would expect everyone to try to find out as much about the country as possible and to meet people and to interpret the United States for those people in terms that would make them more understanding of us and our point of view. We had a very limited representational budget, and it would be reserved for those entertainments for largely Cameroonian guests, so don't expect compensation if one was not entertaining Cameroonians.

That first embassy party brought in a lot of people who were not used to being at the embassy, who didn't really understand how embassy entertainment went or what to do with it, and among our employees were the ones who were not usually included. I included all the drivers, everybody, at that first party. This was my getting-acquainted with them. It set one kind of tone. They felt at least I was not unapproachable and that we were serious in our interest in knowing more about Cameroonians and how they felt.

We had people on the staff who understood and accepted this and worked with it. For instance, when something would appear in the paper-our PAO was named Ted Kennedy. He's a very humane, wonderful, warm kind of person, with a German wife who is a flag-waving American. She really loves the United States and is pleased that her children are American.

But to go back to Ted, himself. When they printed something in the paper that was not sympathetic to the American point of view-it was when the Soviets walked into Afghanistan, and we asked for a Security Council vote against the invasion. The Soviets had handed out a version, and the local editors uncritically printed it. So Ted sat down and explained what had happened. "Oh," [the editor] said, "I didn't know that. We will print that." They printed a very good retraction and explained what actually happened, and how there was almost unanimous voting against this in the Security Council and the General Assembly and the reprimand to the Soviet Union in the General Assembly. The sympathetic approach of explaining things not only took care of our point of view for that occasion, it began making people aware of how you have to read critically what you are receiving before you decide what to do about it.

We received an announcement that from now on, diplomatic agents showing films would have to have the films approved by somebody downtown. With Ted's usual approachable, sympathetic, reasonable, way, he asked, "Why on earth would you do a thing like this when we're performing a service in a city that has no English-speaking theaters?"

"Oh," they said, "that isn't for you. The North Koreans are swamping us with things that we don't approve of, and we have to send out a general announcement, but you can forget about it." [Laughter]

Q: Was it part of your job to try to get the Cameroon vote in the U.N. to go along with us?

SMYTHE: Yes. I would sometimes make representations directly on specific issues, and explain what our point of view was and why we held it and what the payoffs were for them and that sort of thing, and before the General Assembly we would have someone come out. The first year I was there it was George Dalley, deputy assistant secretary for human rights, who came out to go down the whole list of major issues that were to be discussed; and he was prepared to explain in some detail what the various possibilities were on not just human rights issues, but the entire spectrum of issues.

Very early in my tenure there, we were asked to send in suggestions for the way in which we were doing things, and one of my suggestions was utterly predictable for anybody who was familiar with the way things were, and that is you don't wait until you have a crisis and need a vote to start cultivating. You start building your groundwork and get communications so that you can do a sudden request, but you can't expect to do it until you've laid the groundwork for it. We had a feeling that Washington was paying attention to this. I had been watching African policy for a long time and had been concerned that we seemed so ill-informed about African points of view.

It's somewhat like the reactions to "The Africans" on television, the Ali Mazrui series. Now, I don't think that Mazrui has done his best scholarly job of presenting even all African points of view. He's done more with Islam than he has done with the other religious areas, and there are plenty of other religious points of view that deserve to be told. But if we really asked him to tell us how Africans feel and what their point of view is, we're not really very smart in refusing to listen to it and see what they hate about us, what they distrust about us, where they don't understand our point of view, and we need to explain better to them why we have it.

Q: The fact is, we don't understand their point of view.

SMYTHE: We don't understand theirs, and will not as long as we refuse to listen to an Ali Mazrui, because he has a heck of a lot of influence among the intellectuals there, and he is reflecting a prevailing sense of values. I found with my graduate students at Northwestern that I was appalled at some of the things that they took for granted, but then I realized if I had been taught from the time I was a child that the United States is the chief capitalist country in the world and that capitalism can be defined as exploitation of people, not caring about people or human rights or anything else other than profits, we would understand the difficulty they have with giving us the benefit of the doubt. Many of my graduate students accepted this view before they arrived in the United States, but after they had been here for a while, they began explaining to other people, "Well, it's not exactly that way."

Many people complete their education over here and go back to Africa. We have Northwestern graduates all over the world doing all sorts of interesting things. At the time I returned to Northwestern to teach, we had about 140 African students in residence at any one time. That's a substantial number, and a good many of those are people who are going back to be highly influential. If you look at our list of holders of the Ph.D. who have gone back to Africa, what you find is cabinet ministers, members of parliament, highly rated professors and university officials, people who head agencies and organizations. You don't find very many who have fallen to the bottom of the heap. They are automatically in demand because they are so rare. So what we have to do is to take advantage of the fact that they know something about the United States at first-hand, and make it comfortable for them to come to us for help.

People used to come and say, "You know, our book budgets are so small." Knowing that in advance, when I went to Africa, I took with me a good number of books. I left home a good number of books, but I took the books that I felt I could leave in Africa at the university. Some of them were books on Africa, but some of them were just straight textbooks of various kinds that I thought they would be enriched by having. Some were reference books that could be left with them. I took one sentimental thing: I took a set of children's encyclopedia books that the American children could also use while I was there, and enjoy.

I left some books that were for a book sale organized by the women of the embassy; I believe it was for the American school. Any recreational books I had-I think that's what happened to my copy of *The Thornbirds*-I just left them there so they could be sold for a training program for handicapped people. The blind were making baskets and brooms, the deaf were the carpenters, the crippled were doing the sewing, and there was a fourth category I forget now. These were sheltered workshops. The products of those workshops were being sold, and I would take visitors over to buy what they could, because many people were inspired by the products, and some of the products were quite useful and lovely. The women who were raising funds for this cause sold the books, and there were a lot of things that we sold. I tried to use the same techniques we'd use here, giving to Goodwill and so on. I gave books to the university when I left, and some went to the professor who had been appointed to our exchange program and couldn't come. He died only two or three weeks ago, so that's one friend in Cameroon who is no more, but his work was so healing for a country that had been divided. Cameroon is not one that was as deeply divided as some, but in the 1960s there was a good deal of strife for supremacy there.

Q: What about the belief so many Africans have, that America is a colonial power? Or, also, that we're such racists. Did you come across that?

SMYTHE: Yes. I came across some influences, but one of the ways of allaying that is to explain in sufficient detail how things arise and what we do about them. When we showed *Roots*, we had a whole program. We started off by having the Cameroonian employees of the embassy see it first, and we asked them, "Do you think we ought to show it?"

Some of them said, "I'm not so sure. It's pretty strong stuff."

Then others said, "Yes, show it, but know to whom you're showing it and explain to them some questions about this."

So I was asked to chair a panel of people who would talk about it, and the panel was made up of 1) the Fulbright professor who was there at that time, and whom I see every year at the African Studies Association now, 2) two professors who had had Fulbright grants to study in the United States and who felt they had had extensive experience, and 3) a man who had not visited the United States, but who had read widely and felt he had a point of view to express.

So we had this invited crowd. They watched the first two hours or an hour and a half of the program; then we turned the lights on and went inside and sat around for discussion. Well, it was absolutely fascinating. I had asked the black Americans and Africans in the embassy to come over and feel free to comment. One question from an African that was extremely interesting was, "We can't understand why you glorify that primitive life that we're trying to get away from." [Laughter]

Q: That's something you never would have thought of, would you?

SMYTHE: We wouldn't have thought of that. So I explained the romanticism in dealing with Africa that it sprouted from a sense of being able to be proud of one's heritage now, after so long a time of being deprived. You know, they understand a lot of this, and pick it up. If there's one thing I pride myself on being able to do, it's handle controversial material through a dispassionate exposition of the factors involved, and it works every time. If you can keep your ego out of it and let them attack what they want to attack and you can say, "Yes, that's reasonable to attack, and there are some Americans who attack it this way, and there are others who apologize for it and want to hold onto some of the old values, and this is what we have done about it." When they can sit down and talk that much, then light begins to dawn.

One other person who came to the embassy was the editor of Foreign Policy, this long, narrow one. What was his name? He's not with it any more. He was a very provocative kind of speaker, considered leftist by Americans, as pretty far out, but such a lover of the United States that he was a too little defensive, sometimes, if Africans would attack. It was very interesting to see how he would explain things, while thinking of himself as very critical of American ways of doing things. I think the more varied Americans they can send out who can criticize out loud and not have me upset by it, for instance, or anybody else upset by it, the more they begin to understand what we mean by our free press and freedom of discussion and inclination.

Q: The fact that these things are said out loud, and written about in the press, is the best illustration I think we have that the system works.

SMYTHE: Exactly. And they are impressed by it, they are very much impressed by it. To see our diplomats, and some of them-for instance, we had a young fellow who was trained in agriculture. They could not mistake the fact that he was African in descent, and they could not mistake the fact that he had been well educated and knew what he was doing and felt strongly about it, and they could also see him interacting with other AID people. This kind of thing is terribly important for them to see.

Twenty-five years ago, when I was on the Advisory Commission for International, Educational, and Cultural Affairs, we were talking about what to show them and what not to show, and the more we showed, the more easily they accept the fact that Americans are crazy: they'll let you say anything; they'll accept it, but they hate to hear you object to something that they really love and feel strongly about. Somehow it works, and they keep on being able to accept some things that are good about Americans. If you just give them time and a chance to say their piece, they'll hold still while you say yours. I ran into some pretty negative types every now and then. I did a speaking tour for USIA last year, and it was very successful because of this business of not being defensive about the United States, but standing my ground at the same time.

Q: Did you ever get any comments that you're not representative of black people in America because you had special privileges? Did that ever arise?

SMYTHE: Not really. Not very much. They would sometimes worry about the fact that my physical appearance isn't typically African, but they know so many Americans now that they realize there's a spectrum, and I was able to talk about the intermarriage and the mixing during slavery and that sort of thing so that they understand it. But they do want to hear about this. In Cameroon, you know, they had their own minority problem. The English-speaking feel themselves a minority. They feel it isn't fair for them to be restricted to their proportion of the population. They feel that if merit prevailed, they would have more of the high offices than they now have, [Laughter] because they feel that the British prepared them for independence better than the French.

Now, regardless of what your judgment is of their assessment or how qualified they are of assessing this, it's a very interesting thing to talk about. I have talked with English-speaking people, themselves government functionaries, and I said, "We have had the same kind of minority difficulty in the United States. We've got to carry along a minority which feels that it has been put at a disadvantage, and I think one can understand this. But there are some things you can do that are easy to do. For instance, as a diplomat, I have never been invited to attend a ceremony in the English-speaking part of Cameroon. I have been invited to-and I cited two or three places where the diplomatic corps had left Yaoundé and had gone to take part in some special celebration. Now, if the president should go into the English-speaking area and invite people to go with him, this would make a difference. And if he memorized a short speech in English, he could do very well."

They accepted this and talked about it and I kept talking about it, and before I left they scheduled a five-day visit to southwestern Cameroon and stayed there and consulted with the local people, with the conversation chiefly in English. When someone demanded a translation into French, the president said, "I understood that, and I'm not English-speaking. It is your job to know English well enough so you can understand it. We'll not have translation here." So they have made at least a beginning.

It must have been February or March of this year when I read in the New York Times that the president of Cameroon was coming here, and the day that the embassy gave a reception for the president, I had not received an invitation. I said, "Well, I've recently changed addresses. They probably don't know I'm here." The person who called me was one of my predecessors, who is now with Shell Oil Company-he's their international man-and he, of course, was invited. So he said, "I will take the responsibility of calling the embassy and tell them that I have told you to come. So you come and I'll meet you at the hotel at a certain time." So I met him at the hotel, and there was Paul Engo who is Cameroon's permanent representative at the U.N., and we had a little reunion. I went in and I saw that the crowd was largely Cameroonian. There were very few outsiders and there were no other ambassadors except Lewis Hoffacker (the one who had called me) and me, until later on Myles Frechette came in, so I did see him. I had met him in Cameroon last summer.

Anyhow, the president he made a speech in English and brought down the house. The students could not applaud him enough. It was a real sensation. And he had been struggling with English when I was there. We had to speak in French, always. He had taken English lessons, but he didn't have the security to speak. And on this occasion he read his speech, but it was in English. He said, extemporaneously, "We are a bilingual country, so I shall speak in English." And then he read his speech. Well, I thought that was marvelous, and the students thought it was marvelous, and he left a very good feeling there.

Q: These people who are in the minority, the English-speakers, are they from different tribal backgrounds or is just that geographically they were under the British?

SMYTHE: It's geographic. The British had the mandate for western Cameroon, and the French had the mandate for the east. That line was not always a good respecter of tribal origins. It isn't as bad as the major lines between countries, and there is some mixing over the boundaries. But I think that they're on their way. Now that enough cabinet ministers are coming out and demonstrating that they are bilingual, there is a real expectation that the children will know both languages. There's a real expectation, and what they need to do is to put absolutely fascinating reading matter in English that is not readily available in French.

Q: Drive them to it. [Laughter]

SMYTHE: Yes. Then you'll find that they'll do it. Anyhow it's gone fairly well.

Continuation of interview: October 23, 1986

Q: Could you tell me, if you know, who first recommended you to be an ambassador?

SMYTHE: You know, one or two people have told me that they recommended me. One of them was Benjamin Mays, who attended Bates, Muskie's alma mater. Mays was president of Morehouse College in Atlanta, which is a block from my childhood home. Mother and Mrs. Mays were very good friends, and she and Dad had a good deal of contact with the Mays family. He thought well of me, because I sent one of my Japanese students to apply to Morehouse. Dr. Mays gave him a scholarship, and the young man graduated with honors, and was so appreciative of Dr. Mays that every time he got anywhere near Atlanta, he would go and see him. He became one of the leading, I think the leading expert on economic development in Japan, and he was invited to come to the U.N. or to various meetings in the U.S. at least twice a year.

Last year I was sort of a semi-leader of the group of ambassadors who went to visit in Japan. I persuaded him to give a talk on how it was that Japan, which had such poor natural resources, had developed so spectacularly after the second World War. He had it all worked out. His explanation was so lucid and so convincing, and I thought to myself, "I would like Japan to become more cosmopolitan, but it has stood her in good stead to have people who are so attuned to the same values, so willing to work hard for the good of the country, so that instead of having a huge foreign debt, she has a huge debt to her own citizens." That simplifies an awful lot of deficit problems.

Dr. Mays was one who wrote a letter and sent me a copy. A woman I had not met, but who turned out to be a friend of some cousins of mine, said to me one day after I had come back, "I was on the committee that decided you should be appointed ambassador." She said that the Carter White House had wanted to distance itself from the kind of prostitution of ambassadorial appointments to big donors and had asked that committees be set up to screen people who were nominated to be ambassadors. They had all the background and credentials and so on, and while I am not sure whether it was this particular letter that was responsible, somehow my name came up. I had served already on an advisory commission and on the U.S. Commission for UNESCO and the Advisory Council on African Affairs, so I had a track record in the State Department. But I didn't really know. I gathered that a number of people had been appointed to go through the list of persons suggested and indicate which ones were ready and which ones weren't and where they thought the appointments might be most relevant.

Q: Did you meet President Carter at this time?

SMYTHE: No, I didn't meet him when I was appointed. When Hugh was appointed, we went to call on Lyndon Johnson at the White House, but the Carter White House was apparently overbooked and they didn't run all ambassadors by there. I thought it was a mistake, that it's always to one's advantage to be able to refer to, "As the president said to me. . ."

Q: And to have the picture on the piano.

SMYTHE: Yes. It makes a difference. However, when I became deputy assistant secretary, we would sort of take turns escorting chiefs of state to the White House, or ambassadors who were presenting credentials. I arrived at work one day and was told that the Ambassador from Lesotho was presenting her credentials that day and I would be the person to accompany her. I thought this would be a great opportunity to see how it's done in the United States, and a woman ambassador, too, had symbolic interest. She turned out to be a very fine person and became a friend. She had gone to graduate school in the United States, so she was accustomed to American ways and American English. What impressed me was Carter's handling of the interview. He had done his homework. He knew what exports and imports were involved between the two countries. He knew her biographical background and was able to refer to her years at the Enoch Pratt Library School.

Q: All this without notes?

SMYTHE: Yes, without notes. I just read this week a statement by someone from the Carter years who said that Carter was one of the most brilliant men he had ever known. He was capable of absorbing material in this fashion, and he had such a modest demeanor and was not a striking man in any way, so that I suspect people were inclined not to understand the depth that was there, his ability to grasp material and integrate it. And I was impressed with the way Mondale did it. I went to see him at the White House when the president of the National Assembly of Niger, I think, was in town, and, again, he had been well briefed. He was comfortable in talking with the visitor and remembered little personal details that confirmed that he had taken time to learn.

Q: That's amazing, isn't it, with all the other material they have to know, and the number of appointments they have per day.

SMYTHE: Absolutely. Now, I must have seen President Carter on at least six or eight occasions after that. I went to greet two chiefs of state. The president of Rwanda was the first one, and I took him to the White House. Unfortunately, the only appointment we could get him was in the middle of the reception that the Carters were having for a Congressional Black Caucus weekend attended by 2,000 people, all of whom seemed to be at the White House. President Carter excused himself and came downstairs and had a few minutes with the Rwandan president, and a ceremonial picture was taken so that the guest could take back photographic evidence of their meeting.

The next one I got was the prime minister of Madagascar. He's no longer living; he died a year after he'd been here. He was already past eighty, I think, but he seemed younger. I took my sister that day, because he was coming in at National airport on a scheduled plane. It wasn't coming in at Andrews Air Force Base, as they do when they arrive on personal airplanes. She was absolutely fascinated by the way they commandeered the lounge and put security people around and saw to it that he disembarked and was greeted first, and then we moved to the waiting cars, leaving the area to the other passengers. It was very smoothly done. These young security men who take care of it must have to go through it so often that they really know what they're doing and make no waste motions and overlook nothing that has to do with his security.

I passed the outriders and the police escort cars and all the rest of it yesterday. I can't remember who was here, but I had received a notice from the Council on Foreign Relations that Quett Masire, the president of Botswana, would be here about this time.

I thought I would attend that one, because I'm going to be in New York on Monday interviewing prospective presidents for Spelman College. This is to be at 8:00 Tuesday morning. I haven't seen President Masire since the funeral of Sir Seretse Khama, and he had such a warm regard for the American friends that I was with, two Americans who had known him in his student days and in his earlier government days, that I thought it would be nice to see him again and see what he is doing and saying, now that six years have passed. It was July of 1980 when I met him. As a matter of fact, I remember the very day, the 23rd of July, because on the 24th we went to Zimbabwe and met with Robert Mugabe. It was a very interesting experience to be in Southern Africa and to see those two countries. But it's been cancelled, so I have no worry about Tuesday morning.

Anyway, I thought he was coming past, and it must be a heady experience to be riding through Washington and seeing the city and seeing so many things that are totally different from one's own background. It meant a great deal to the president of Cameroon. He had come over in the Kennedy days, and my first trip to southeast Cameroon was an occasion when I could take an old film of that visit to President Kennedy. It was fascinating for me to see the audience watch the film. They were so astonished. When he said goodbye to President Kennedy, he sat back in one of these stretch limousines that has never been seen in Cameroon. For them, a small Mercedes sedan is the biggest of cars, and to see this huge thing for their president, and to see him drive off with the Cameroon flag, was just the kind of thing that thrilled them all.

The second thing that they paid most attention to was a shot of one of our thruways with all the cloverleaves full of traffic. I think it may have been the Los Angeles freeway. Cars were in every lane, in every direction, and they just showed this intersection of two highways with the four cloverleaf roads, and when they first saw it, they didn't know what it was. Then the lens zoomed in and they could see it was cars on a road, and an audible sort of appreciative sigh went up at that. These are the things that aren't strange to us, but that really strike them between the eyes.

Q: The vastness of everything.

SMYTHE: Yes, the plentifulness of transportation. They know what traffic jams are in Lagos, but that's not the same thing as this, with thousands of cars going through every second. It's a very impressive country to a visitor from a very small developing country.

Q: Was there any reaction one way or the other to you, a woman, being appointed ambassador?

SMYTHE: I was looking for that to see what might be the reactions. The president reacted to it in a very interesting way. He is a Muslim, a devout Muslim, but African Muslims are not Arab Muslims. He said, "You will be a role model for our women." And do you know, within six months, 10 percent of the National Assembly was made up of women. I'm not suggesting cause and effect, but he was aware of the emphasis on human rights from Carter.

There is something I should put in here. On my CV, there was a line about my serving as deputy director of research for the NAACP for the school segregation cases. I had just come back from two years in Japan, and they asked if I would work with it, and I was delighted to do so. First of all, I didn't have a job; and in the second place, I saw this as making history. It was the most fascinating thing I've done, in many ways. But the thrust of that was he thought of me as a civil rights worker. And I had another line on my CV: I was scholar-in-residence for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in '73, '74. So here are two things that tie me to civil rights.

I learned later on that he had been a little concerned about this ambassador who was coming. In the first place, a woman, and it must mean a wild-eyed radical of a woman [Laughter]; but human rights, as it was then being enunciated from Washington, sounded strident to many ears in one-party countries. The idea of having a civil rights advocate come in and criticize what was or wasn't happening in Cameroon was a little unsettling, but apparently there was not a feeling that this would be enough to refuse agreement, and they ended up responding with reasonable dispatch, I think. So it went through, but I was notified, it seems to me, in February or March, and the announcement was made about the 24th of April.

Q: It took that long to get agreement?

SMYTHE: It took a while to get it done.

Q: You think it was your perceived politics rather than your gender that was upsetting them?

SMYTHE: I think so.

Q: In other words, they didn't really care whether you were a man or a woman?

SMYTHE: I think I was the first woman ambassador that ever set foot in Cameroon, and they had not had one themselves. I think they still have not had one. But they had two women in the cabinet. Their minister of social welfare and the vice minister of education were both women.

Q: It's curious, isn't it? Diplomacy seems to be the last breakthrough. It's all right to have them working at home, but you can't send them abroad to represent you.

SMYTHE: Yes! And the interesting thing is, many women might have a better flair for diplomacy, I would think, according to most stereotypes, then many men. There were two women, I think, accredited to Cameroon. There was one from Pakistan and there was another one. She was resident in Nigeria, so she didn't come very often. I saw her only once.

Q: Were these chiefs of missions?

SMYTHE: Yes, but accredited to more than one country. simply because they couldn't afford that many embassies. I don't think we had another resident woman while I was there, but I think after I left another woman appeared on the scene. They were already having international women's conferences, and one of the first occasions for me to act as hostess after I presented my credentials was a tea for the women who were attending such conference. Then I found out that women who had grown up in a francophone tradition had never heard of a tea, didn't know what it was. One woman looked at this spread with little sandwiches and cakes and coffee and tea and asked if she could have a martini. [Laughter] Isn't that incredible? But I suppose it stems from a British tradition, and the French never heard of it and never practiced it. But we used to have teas and coffees all the time in Syria. That is part of their heritage, as well.

Q: What sort of a relationship were you able to develop with the head of state? He was, as you say, a Muslim, and therefore, probably uncomfortable being with a woman. Was he, perhaps?

SMYTHE: Not so much. He got so that there were times when we would talk essentially alone. He would have an interpreter around, but most of the time he could manage with my French and I could manage with his. He didn't attempt to speak English, but he declared that he could understand it and was quoted as saying to his cabinet that he understood it and they should learn to understand it, because it was a bilingual country, with the attendant obligations.

Q: How much French had you had? Did you have more of it back here? You didn't have much time.

SMYTHE: I had had French in high school and college and had passed my doctoral exams in French and German, but that doesn't require very much French.

Q: That's mainly it's reading, isn't it?

SMYTHE: It's really reading and translating, and that's far different. I had taken some French lessons and been tutored in French when I was in Damascus, because I needed that more than I needed the Arabic. Everybody in the diplomatic corps already spoke some French, and most of them spoke English. I had a kind of immersion in French while I was getting prepared to go overseas. My French grammar was excellent when I was a student because that was my meat. I liked the grammar better than I did the speaking, but I had lost a lot of that and had forgotten a lot of the details. Some of them came back, but not very many, and I hadn't ever been fluent in speaking it. So I worked on that, and I got to the point where I suppose I was about a three.

I was able to do some things. For instance, when I went to Zaire, USIS interviewed me for radio, and I warned them that they'd probably have to splice and put it together, but they were able to manage by simply cutting some of what I said, when I'd stop and ask the interviewer what the word for something was, and that sort of thing, but I could manage. I had overcome my shyness about speaking if you weren't sure you were correct in grammar, but I never got so that I would really launch out into public speaking in French. I could have done it if I had really taken the bull by the horns.

Q: Of course, you had an awful lot of other things to do and a lot on your mind at this time. You brought your own secretary with you?

SMYTHE: Yes. I had an absolute ideal. In the first place, I knew the kind of temperament that she had. She could get along with anybody. She was bilingual in French and English. Her mother was a French war bride, and as a little girl she had been taken to France to visit her grandmother and her other relatives, and that went on until she was fifteen and quite good at French. She warned me that her education in French had not gone beyond a teenager's vocabulary, and therefore she couldn't discuss very complicated subjects. Her French was so incredibly natural that people could not believe it when they heard it.

Q: How did you find this gem?

SMYTHE: She was my secretary at the Phelps-Stokes Fund. Now, let me tell you: this gem, that wasn't all she had. She had done a stint in the Peace Corps-in Africa! She had been in Niger, and, as a matter of fact, had become so devoted to Niger that she made it her business to introduce herself to the staff, and the ambassador considered her and six other people in Cameroon as honorary Nigerians. So she was invited to everything that they had in the Niger embassy, of an appropriate size, all the receptions and so on.

She was a couple of years younger than I was. She had maturity, utter discretion. She would have made a diplomat par excellence. She cared about little things like politeness and tone, courtesies like standing up when a visiting ambassador came to call, and she taught the others in my office the same thing if they seemed not to know. Perfect on the telephone. She said, "I'm a Katherine Gibbs graduate of sorts, but I'm not really a fast typist and I'm not a great one." Her shorthand was not terribly good, but shorthand is not for this period in history, anyway. It's an old-fashioned, time-consuming thing that ties up two people, so we could do with other kinds of mechanical recording. It was her personality, her complete discretion-I could trust her without any question-and her ability to empathize with the people of the country. She would say to me, "I heard one of our Marines make a disparaging remark about the people, and maybe they need to be taught more how to handle relations with the local employees." This was such a help.

Q: Another pair of eyes for you, and ears, too.

SMYTHE: A pair of eyes and real understanding.

Q: Well, also, it would seem to me that, given the awful circumstances just prior to your going out there, it must have helped you because she had been through it with you.

SMYTHE: Yes. To have a friend. She had been through it, she understood. She was really hoping that I could take her along, and I was hoping she would. I didn't want to deprive the Phelps-Stokes Fund. The president [Franklin H. Williams] is a former ambassador himself to Ghana and to the U.N., so he readily understood and put nothing in her way, and she loved every minute of it.

Q: Was she your confidante, to a certain extent?

SMYTHE: Yes, she was, in a way. She was my family. She would come in. One day, she'd say, "You know, I haven't had a squeeze from my ambassador for quite a while." [Laughter]

Q: Not your ordinary ambassador-secretary relationship! You mentioned yesterday that economic development was your principal interest. Does that mean that you spent most of your time and interest with the economic section, and AID?

SMYTHE: No, but it does mean that they knew that I was interested and would come and share with me plans that they had, or concerns that they had, and I would ask them to brief me on what was going on. Of course, when people like CEOs or heads of the chocolate manufacturing association came through Cameroon, they'd come and call on me, and the economic officer would go out of his way to suggest that I meet so and so who's here. I made some good friends that way, and it was very helpful to me because my background is in economics.

I was convinced that we needed to beef up our approaches through regular business channels, and many business people simply did not know how to approach Cameroon, how to approach a developing country. I began forming some opinions about what could go wrong, and collecting case histories. One program fell flat because the person who had been involved in it in the corporation got promoted to another job that took his attention somewhere else. The person who succeeded him had no background, and simply the chemistry of this person and the Cameroonian representative clashed, and there went a well-thought-out thing with a good feasibility study. It simply fell flat. I had to pick up the pieces.

The foreign minister was terribly disappointed because Cameroon wanted American business to come in. They wanted to learn economic management, commercial management. What I had hoped was that we could have an American manager come in and help him to relate to a Cameroonian manager, who would learn the importance of keeping out of the commercial sphere some of the customs that disregard productivity. For instance, in Nigeria when we were working on the book, we encountered a woman who went to Kingsway Department Store and helped herself to things and said, "My son is manager of this department. I can have anything I want here." With that kind of cultural practice, you have to find ways. In the first place, having the people who are responsible understand what that does to their ability to report the kinds of results that they're supposed to produce. It can be done, but it takes a lot of good human relations to do it.

This was a project where a corporation proposed to have the country take 50,000 acres and devote it to the production of corn. Corn was cheaper shipped from Iowa than it was from Cameroon farmers, so what we wanted to do was to enable them to produce some corn and be able to feed the animals that we were using in some AID projects and, as well, feed people and other animals. The project agreement was all but signed, and then a shift of personnel took place. The new one coming in had no particular interest in it, had no background, and the other fellow did not have sufficient time to brief him adequately. So he came to Cameroon expecting to do in a weekend what you do in a weekend in New York or Chicago, and it didn't work that way. So one of the things I was doing was trying to translate local perceptions and ways of doing business to the business people who were coming in. In fact, I was thinking that when I left the diplomatic corps, I would perhaps do some consulting on how to go into a developing country, how you form contacts, and what you do when you get them. What you do when you get them isn't saying, "Now let's get down to business. How can we do this and how much will it cost?" You simply can't do it that way.

Q: Is there a great deal of ceremony in the interaction of people?

SMYTHE: There is. Part of the ceremony is demonstrating that you care enough about the people to be trusted, and until that takes place, you can't really make much progress.

Q: Millions of cups of coffee and that sort of thing?

SMYTHE: Not only that. You can't do it in one trip. It's done most successfully if you have a person there who can represent the company in your absence after you've gone back home and who can continue to talk with the people and report back to the home office. But to expect to go out and work out things is very visionary. It doesn't work that way, even though Cameroon had some well-trained, Western-educated people who did understand how they did it at Harvard, because they had graduated from the business school at Harvard. The man who was negotiating oil leases from Cameroon had a Harvard M.B.A., the man who went to head up Chase Manhattan's Cameroon branch had an M.B.A. from an American institution, so there were people who knew and who had some background, but after they stayed in Cameroon a while and been subject to Cameroon ways of doing things, they needed a refresher course sometimes, and they need to be helped to bridge the gap between the two ways of doing things.

It was absolutely fascinating, and I found that when I would sit down with people and talk with the elders about how things could develop, they were willing to listen because they thought there was something miraculous about what we could do. They would take it very seriously-I found this later when I was at Northwestern. I sent business interns over to work in some of the countries, and one colleague who had gone to Kenya and worked with the Kenya Women Finance Trust, as it was called, said it astonished her. They didn't ask how much experience she had; they simply listened to everything as though she had the answers, and if she had done a year of graduate school, in business, then they should honor what she had to say. Her own natural humility and efforts to understand other people were flummoxed by this at first. She didn't know quite how to accept gracefully the tribute they were making to her education and, at the same time, to acquaint them with the fact that they were giving her a great deal, and that she appreciated it. It takes a great deal of understanding.

I think we need a great deal more interchange and experiences in each other's countries if we're going to do business. The more we can do of that, the better, I think, because without business contacts and business investment in countries, they don't develop.

Q: Did you do a lot of representational entertaining of these different groups?

SMYTHE: Yes, and we would have people who were knowledgeable about business matters, USIA would have people coming over who would talk about American business and how it operates, but they were just learning. They were not used to it, either. They were used to handling college professors who would come over, and, after all, a university is the most worldwide of the cultural organizations. There is thought to be something of an international standard or pattern of behavior, which wasn't always true of commercial ways of doing things. The fact that there were different laws and different accounting methods and techniques, different banking requirements and procedures, these made the commercial life a lot stranger than we would normally expect. American commercial people are not deeply devoted to learning. They want to do things quickly. They don't want to stop and study and have to wait. We are so used to pell-mell activity.

Q: Did you have other cultural events come through with USIA? Did you have many of the wonderful black musicians come through, for example?

SMYTHE: Yes. We didn't have as many as we might have. I'm trying to think of a group. There was a group that was essentially a gospel-singing group, and they were very successful. I hadn't heard of them before, but they came to us from Nigeria and the Nigerian telegram said that they were really very good and connected with their audiences very well, so we looked forward to it. I went to their program which was given on the university campus, and they were very well received. We didn't have any huge groups, like orchestras or dance groups, but Cameroonians were very glad to have the ones that we did have. One pianist, for instance, who comes around, or one-as a matter of fact, instrumental performers are very much prized. They want to know about instruments that are not totally familiar, and if the performers are good people who are curious also about the host's instruments, they enjoy getting together with such visitors.

Q: What about leadership grants? Did you arrange for many leadership grants?

SMYTHE: We had a fair number.

Q: Did you, yourself, bother with that, or did you have your political people or your economic people do that?

SMYTHE: Well, in an embassy that small, I was very close to all of the programs that we had, and we would talk every year. We made up a list of the people who were promising young leaders to send in, and why. We went out of our way to see that people who had something to give, or who were likely to be very prominent themselves, would come over and get an experience in Washington. Sometimes I would write to people that I knew had an interest in common with the ones who were going, and see that they were involved. I find myself still doing it.

Q: What about your DCM? Did you inherit a DCM?

SMYTHE: I inherited one and found him a very interesting person. Did you ever know Bill Mithoefer?

Q: No.

SMYTHE: He had spent sixteen years in Africa, I think, when I arrived there, and he was being advised to leave Africa and broaden his background, because he was in the political cone, and Bill is still in Africa. Well, Bill is possibly the most prolific collector of African art, if one is prolific in a passive pursuit like that. He was one of the most assiduous collectors of African art in the Foreign Service. He's well known, and some of his art is on display in the Museum of African Art here. At the time I met him, he admitted to a market value of a million dollars or more in African art. He had learned what is valuable and what isn't, and in addition to getting authentic art-and he was a fairly experienced judge of what was authentic-he would not invest in pieces that weren't elegant. They might be ever so genuine ethnically, but he wasn't going to get just anything because it was of anthropological interest. He wanted it also to be of artistic interest.

When he went to Liberia, Bill had a standing arrangement with me that he'd buy African art, and every now and then I'd get a cable from Bill describing what he had found, "Shall I buy it?" And usually I would say, "Yes, buy it," so I got some of my best pieces through him that way.

Q: His tour of duty ended, I suppose?

SMYTHE: I think it ended theoretically five or six months after I came, but we were about to be inspected and I suggested that they let him remain longer, until the inspection was complete, since I was new and his successor would be even newer. So they let him stay until the 1st of November, 1978. I had arrived September 1, 1977, so I had him for over a year.

He was sort of a diamond in the rough, not a smooth article, but Bill had some qualities that were really very good. Number one, was he didn't mind working around the clock if need be, and he had a lively curiosity. We went to the airport one day to greet someone, and while I was in the middle of greeting whoever it was, he sidled off and sought out an airplane pilot he had seen standing by a small plane, and found out that this was an American pilot and made friends with him, and found that he was ferrying Jonas Savimbi around. [Laughter] So he had that kind of common sensibility to keep finding things.

He became acquainted with everybody. What he did was to develop friends on his own level, or a couple notches below, who'd be flattered to have the American DCM pay attention to them, and many of them were extremely loyal to him and he found out a lot of good things. He wasn't the world's greatest writer, but he had learned how to be concise and to put down on paper what he needed to know, and he was a fairly prolific reporter. He worked very well, and I didn't need an elegant smoothie who would impress everyone with his sophistication at a post like that. I needed somebody who wasn't thrown when he needed to deal with grassroots people and find out things. I enjoyed working with him. Every now and then I was exasperated,, too, because he was inclined to laugh a little too loud, to be a little less elegant than he needed to be, but on the whole it worked and people felt good about him.

Peter Lord came. I wasn't happy with getting rid of Bill at the end of the time because he had enough knowledge of the place, and unfortunately, I had arrived at the same time as a new admin officer, a new GSO, a new consular officer, and a new budget and fiscal officer. So we were going to have about 90 percent of the embassy turnover at one time, and I wanted to hold him and then have the new one come in when I'd be halfway through my time and then he would extend over past another one. It didn't work out that way, but they gave me a list of four or five people who would be available, and I went over the list and got some recommendations. I was going to be in Washington, so I made it my business to find the ones who were going to be in Washington and talk to them. It looked on the face of it as if Peter Lord would be a good person to come by, and I talked with people who said that he was a very good number two man. He had worked with three women ambassadors, almost in succession.

I found him to be a thorough kind of person, ambitious, strong in a lot of good ways. For instance, he was a very fair-minded person. In supervising the staff, you would count on him not to be accused of picking on someone or favoring somebody to the detriment of somebody else, and many times he would come up with a remark about someone who was not perfect in something, and point out some of his or her strengths somewhere else. I find that a very useful kind of balance to supply, especially in a small embassy. It's too easy to have things devolve into cliques and a kind of in-group, out-group performance that destroys morale, and when I went to Cameroon, I had been warned that morale had been a problem. I don't know all the reasons, but there had been something like four marriages that had broken up (one of them being Bill Mithoefer's), and the wives were in the United States and the husbands out in Cameroon. I was forewarned and therefore worked very hard to see that every wife who wanted a job was helped to find one, and we were able to provide 100 percent employment. Not necessarily the dream job, but a job that had enough good in it so that people felt that they were not being misused.

Now, I had one-and I hope I learned a lot from it-one situation in which we were going to have a family liaison officer for the first time, and it would be one of the wives of the embassy. Four of them applied. One of them was the wife of the officer to whom she would report, so there was clearly a problem of conflict of interest, and so she wisely decided to withdraw her application. That left us with three people. One, a young woman who was-I don't remember whether she was pregnant then or whether the baby had already come, but she wanted the job. There was a second applicant, a wife who really wanted to advance her career; meanwhile she needed something to keep her busy.

The third one was one whose marriage broke up, after they and I had left Cameroon. It didn't happen there; at least, I don't believe so. Anyhow, she was a charming, intelligent person. (All of the candidates were good people.) Any one of them could have done a creditable job, and the task of deciding among them was going to be a tough one.

I formed a committee. Bill Mithofer and I agonized over how we could best avoid doing it in such a way that people would be embarrassed, and, luckily, there were four people and only one position, so that anyone who didn't get it had company in not being selected. The committee came back and reported that they didn't have a definite recommendation to make; they didn't want to do that, but they had asked these questions. They had listed a series of six or seven questions to ask people in the embassy, and particularly the wives of embassy officers: What do you need a family representative for? If you had to choose one, which of these candidates do you think would best meet your needs and why?

The answers surprised me-the charming one, they thought, would not be as attentive to them. She had her own program and lots of initiative, but they didn't think she'd listen to them. The former missionary, they thought, might be less than understanding of people who were not religious, and they were afraid she'd be less tolerant in some subtle ways. The other candidate they had no strong objection to, and she had had a bit more experience because she had been working with the American Club and managing things, so that they knew her a little better. There was an implication that they felt more comfortable with the third one, who had the club experience.

So I called them in one at a time, starting with the unsuccessful ones, and explained that they were seen as qualified, but that the overall evidence seemed to point to another candidate. So they knew they weren't going to get it before she knew she was going to get it. They both sort of accepted it. The charming one that they thought wouldn't listen to other people was the most deeply disappointed, because she saw herself as having devoted more time to appealing to Washington to send us a family officer, and she felt that she was, in a way, entitled to it. She had thought of it and wanted it and had said she wanted it. Well, I had realized they wouldn't be happy. The former missionary and her husband threatened a discrimination suit because the successful candidate was black, and therefore, they decided, there had been favoritism. So I sat down and talked with them at some length and then told them a little more than I had told her at first about the feelings of some people, and in the end they accepted it. They withdrew, and that was the end of it. I paid a little extra attention to her to make sure that she was aware of her value. And what happened was that when Chad was evacuated and some real organization by women was needed. That was her meat, and she was excellent at it. She liked the charitable end of things, and she did have a tendency to want to decide things for other people; and she could do this with people who were feeling a little helpless and needed mothering. So she was a real success there.

We found a job for the one who had withdrawn because her husband would be her boss, and she accepted that. I hadn't fully realized that this was another marriage that was going down the drain. It was too bad, because her good qualities appeared not to dovetail with his needs. I hope she's found happiness somewhere else, because she was a nice person, too.

Q: Do you think that the Foreign Service life contributed appreciably to the breakup of these marriages?

SMYTHE: I would say, yes, if it weren't for the fact that I see just as many breaking up right here. I don't know. I look at people in that age group. I don't know but one family of the young people who grew up with my daughter-the five or six girls who were her closest friends-that really succeeded and seemed to grow up, so that a person understands that life is not going to be like that pictured in the ads. Something has to give, and you simply can't have a fairy tale existence. It isn't there. That isn't what you work for; that isn't what you hope for. And, strangely enough, if you had it, you might be appalled at how dull it could be. [Laughter]

Fortunately, we had a lot of highly intelligent, well-prepared young people, and the wives did have things to give. Those who gave, in the American school, for example, could be very happy.

I went by to see one of those wives last year when I was on the USIA speaking trip. I stayed with her in Tanzania. She was getting up at 6:00 in the morning so she could be at the American school at 7:00 or 7:15 to do her day's work. She was working like a Trojan and she was perfectly content, and her children are all doing well, and her husband is not straying. I said to myself, "Where there's this solid commitment and people don't expect the moon, they're making it." But I don't know how you do that in a time when people get their kicks from taking a drug, for example, instead of writing a poem. Life is difficult-I grant that-but is it really so difficult that so many people can't cope? I just don't accept that. To go overseas is such a privilege for people who have the sense of commitment and the realization that it's not going to be easy, that there are all kinds of problems to face. As for the problems of safe water and running toilets, those things are really not a very big part of our happiness. And we do supply them, so people are very fortunate. Somehow they are more dependent on each other, and if they don't ask the impossible of each other, they can make a very good life. Now, my secretary, who is this marvelous human being, was happy as a clam. She looked up all the Peace Corps volunteers that she had known when she was one, and those that she hadn't known, she made friends with and had over to her house. Heaven, for her, was a peaceful home where she could share what she had with whoever came by. She was happy as could be and looks back on those days with great pleasure.

Q: Don't you think, if you can have only one attribute in the Foreign Service, the one you must have is curiosity?

SMYTHE: Absolutely. I was going to say adaptability, but you don't adapt unless you are curious about what's there. There is so much to see in the world, and enjoy. The arts in Cameroon were delightful. You could get such comfortable clothing, tie-dyed things, and there were lots and lots of arts around to watch. There were games. People were good-natured. They were basically friendly. You could practice languages, and if you got tired of one, there were 190 others.

Q: And relations between the two countries were good, were they not?

SMYTHE: They were.

Q: When you got there they were good, and you perpetuated it, of course.

SMYTHE: And they were positive. There were people who had grown up thinking that capitalism is exploitation, so therefore if you are American, you really want to exploit people. But then they were surprised to find how many Americans really were decent human beings who enjoyed exchanges of experiences and sharing of meals and that sort of thing, so that some good friendships got made, too.

Q: Did you have many codels {congressional delegations} come through and VIPs?

SMYTHE: No. We didn't have codels. We were about to have one come by. Just before he came a cropper, Congressman Diggs was coming by. But, you know, I had called on everybody on the Hill and had invited people to come. I had urged Steve Solarz to come. I had urged everybody I talked with to see if a codel which was going somewhere else couldn't stop by Cameroon, because it was important. You are so right to identify VIP visitors as a great asset for the embassy. It gave us a chance to invite in people we might not otherwise have a contact with, and it was instructive to our congresspeople. If they didn't know what the circumstances were, they could have a very different view of things.

One member of Congress I developed great respect for was Millicent Fenwick [congresswoman and later ambassador]. When I first talked with her, she was thinking of how silly it was for us to hold out for a genuine, honest-to-goodness election in Zimbabwe. She said, "We're not really going to have a better representative than Bishop Muzorewa, are we? Is there really going to be somebody better elected?"

I took some time-she didn't rush me-and talked to her about the time that Columbia University wanted to build a gym in one of the Harlem parks for their physical education classes, and they were going to release it for use by the neighborhood when they weren't busy with classes. The treasurer said to me, "Now, wouldn't it be great for the Harlem people to have a gym they can use?" I said, "Wouldn't it be better if the Harlem people were asked what they wanted and given a chance to be part of the decision?" and he could understand that. I repeated that to Fenwick, and she understood what I meant.

Later on, when Equatorial Guinea became independent, I went to her. I said, "I think you'd be interested in knowing that here is a small country which has been carried down to the bottom of the economic ladder by circumstances beyond our prediction at the time of independence." I told her about the actions of the dictatorial ruler that they had, Macías Nguema, who was thought to be a very mild-mannered civil servant. The Spanish had built him up and left him in charge of the country when they withdrew, and they were confident he was going to be at least a sensible person. But some people get paranoid after a while and they sometimes don't see where their interests lie. They begin suspecting everyone around them, and that happened to him. So what he did was systematically destroy people who did not agree with him or support him, and he destroyed the country in so doing. When he was overthrown and Spain was invited to come back and help them get on their feet again, the Spanish asked us, "Please send an ambassador there, and have somebody resident in Equatorial Guinea so that they know that we are being supported by the United States."

I went to Madrid and met with the foreign minister and the people who handed Equatorial Guinea for the Spanish, and with [Ambassador] Terry Todman, who was then in Spain, and we talked about the great need. I told Mrs. Fenwick about the whole thing, that how, if we take Equatorial Guinea as a case in point, here is a country which had been taken over almost lock, stock, and barrel by the Russians. They had an agreement that Equatorial Guineans could no longer fish, that they would have the right to fish in territorial waters, and that they would share the catch with the local people, with the country, and that they would therefore destroy all the native fleets.. I said, "We disliked the dominance of Russia there. We didn't like having the Cubans there (and this was their staging place for going into Angola). They have ordered the Russians to withdraw and reduce their embassy. They have taken away the fishing rights."

Q: The Guineans had?

SMYTHE: The Guineans had. "They have invited us in. Spain, which is under great duress to keep us from having Torrejon Air Force Base and the other bases that we have in Spain, has only this one possession in a former colony in Africa and wants us to work with her. It seems to me all of these things make us want to do something. It will cost us \$1 million simply to say, "Okay, we'll have an embassy, the minimum embassy we can put up, represent us there, with a very junior ambassador. We'll have a very tiny program of AID while these people get on their feet." Disaster relief and refugee aid would be enough just to get them so they can feed themselves (and we knew they could feed themselves, because they used to). If they have thrown out the Reds on the advice that the Americans thought that was a good thing, don't you think we ought to come back and do something about it?"

She, herself, sponsored putting the million dollars in the budget that had been cut out. So she came around and supported us when she saw the reason for it, and I always felt that she was the kind of person who was intellectually honest. If she saw the rationale for things, she would do her own investigating, and if she saw that it stood up, she'd go along and support it. She was not just being doctrinaire. I think she made mistakes in judgment simply because she didn't know Africa; she didn't know enough about what was going on there. When somebody took the trouble to explain and demonstrate, she was as willing as the next fellow to say, "Well, this is true rather than that. I think our policy ought to follow the true path." As long as she remained in Congress, I felt that there was a potential friend there.

Q: Now, Andrew Young came through?

SMYTHE: Yes. He came through in September of 1979, bringing with him a group of business people.

Q: Was this at your recommendation?

SMYTHE: Yes. I will confess, I nagged him every time I saw him. Before I went over, I had gone to his office and said, "I really want you to come to Cameroon. It's very important, and it's important for them to understand the kind of structure that you're trying to build up, as well as the kind of economic and commercial relations required." I was aware that the potential was there. Cameroon has more to offer American business people than most developing countries, because they do have an infrastructure in place. You don't feel as if you're starting from scratch. There are a number of people there who are interested in cooperative ventures, and I think this is the time to pursue them. I was, frankly, trying to expand our ability to relate to the Cameroonians and to work with them through having business people who did a creative job of working for mutual benefit.

We needed a sufficiently large corps of American business operating in one country-and I saw this potential in Cameroon. When I first went there, there were four or five oil exploration projects and other [companies] who had contracts to assess the oil properties, but we didn't have many resident business people. As time went on, there was a little accretion. There was one construction company that was doing fairly well. There were people who were investing in things like the new sugar factory and the new leather factory; American Express was one of the larger investors in the latter. The more success they had with small investments, the more other people were interested in hearing about Cameroon, and by the time I had been there two years, I was seeing three times as many business people as I had earlier. Do you know why? Because Chase Bank Cameroon had opened up. Once you have a bank, so that you can do banking more easily, once you have a critical mass of people who are devoted to American business, everything is easier.

I can't remember whether it was Peat, Marwick and Mitchell or Lazard Frères or who, but we had accountants and business service people, as well as construction people, as well as some people who were buying and selling agricultural products. By the time you get enough of them and a bank and accountants in place, then it's easier to do business. But when they didn't have enough people to attract American services, everything was a chore. You had to deal with the French banking system, which was very different, and complicated the contact with your own American banks. To deal with the legal system, you needed people who understood it, but who also understood English and could advise you with clarity. We had a Yale-trained lawyer whose father was president of the National Assembly. He was the attorney for the embassy, and if we had legal issues, we could ask him to deal with them.

These things are terribly important. You have to have a school for the children. The wife of our young consul in Douala, who came in after I had arrived, was concerned for her children, and especially her older boy, who was about to start second grade, so she organized a school and got it started in Douala, and it made a difference to American business people. They could recruit staff more readily, if there were a school. We needed better hospital facilities. The United States and the French government jointly built a new hospital to serve the medical school in Yaoundé, which had been an AID project under contract to Harvard University, which supplied personnel, I think four American M.D.s. We had six, but one of them was a Peace Corps doctor and another worked for AID. Well, when you have that nucleus, you can at least get an American-trained doctor, and there were American-trained Cameroonian doctors, one of them a Harvard med graduate who was the obstetrician for most of the pregnant women on or married to members of our staff.

Q: You had good enough facilities they could have their babies there?

SMYTHE: The doctor in question said that he sent his wife overseas for her babies because he could give the service, but he could not guarantee the nursing service or the operating room care. Frankly, cleanliness was a big issue.

Q: Where did they go? To Frankfurt?

SMYTHE: They went to Frankfurt or they went to the American Hospital in Paris. My first month there, we had an evacuee go to the American Hospital in Paris for an appendectomy. After I left, the Ethiopian wife of one of USIS employees had to have her appendix out in an emergency. It was done by a former assistant professor of medicine at the Yale Medical School. The doctor was a brother of our lawyer and son of the president of the National Assembly. (All of his children were educated in the States.) But he couldn't provide the aftercare, and she had a problem with an infection and had to be flown to Paris, where she died after heroic measures of treatment, at twenty-nine years old, which is so sad. But we do have a problem with health.

Q: Did any good business ventures come out of the visit of Andrew Young?

SMYTHE: I left three months after he did, so that I don't honestly know, but my guess is that there was disappointment. The visitors became eager to know more. They considered the stop in Cameroon the most rewarding of all the travel because it was unexpected and they hadn't realized what a really promising market was there. You see, Cameroon is the entry point for some landlocked countries, too, and the customs union brings merchandise into the port at Douala and then into the interior by train and then by truck from there to N'Djamena or to Bangui, the capital of CAR, on inside and some of it goes to Congo (Brazzaville) and some to Gabon, so that a great deal of shipping takes place there.

Q: I have here a note about serious clashes with security forces in Dolle. "Arab village of Dolle near the northern border with Chad announced that a total of thirty people had been killed. There were protests by villagers over alleged embezzlement of funds for the construction of a school, and it culminated in the killing of a number of gendarmes. A commando unit was sent in to suppress the apparent revolt and allegedly conducted a systematic massacre, with casualties running into several hundreds." That was in November of 1979.

SMYTHE: I remember that.

Q: But it didn't concern you?

SMYTHE: Yes, it did, and we were aware of it. I had quite forgotten it. They wanted their children to be educated, and I think the issue was a junior high school that had been promised and had never materialized. I am not sure about the embezzlement of funds, but I remember there was a clash. There was poor communication and I am sure it involved some intertribal rivalries. Neither spoke the other's language, and these were not highly-educated people. When the gendarmes came in, there was potential resistance without waiting for them to act-and perhaps they challenged the people who were there. But the people who were there did not attempt to hear them out or conduct a very calm discussion about it, and there was a good deal of animosity.

What happened was that they killed half a dozen police, and when one or two survivors ran back and reported this, a whole unit went out, and that unit shot first and asked questions later, so there were a good many people killed. We could not get an absolute answer as to how many people were killed on each side. It was a very confused situation, and unfortunately there was some justification to the charges that they had been unfairly treated so far as educational disparity was concerned. I don't know what had happened to the money, whether it had been embezzled or what. But I do know that they felt very deeply that they needed not only a school, but people to teach, and books and equipment, as well as the other things. They felt were losing out relative to people in other parts of Cameroon.

Q: Is that something that came up under the human rights offenses?

SMYTHE: No. This happened in November of '79. They were preparing for a huge party meeting that they have once every five years, and the president was planning his speech to them, and making promises as to what he was going to do about various things that were happening. I attended that meeting the week before I left Cameroon. I attended that meeting and then flew directly from that meeting, which was in Bafoussam, to Equatorial Guinea to pay my farewell call, and then back to Yaoundé. From then on, I felt as if I were on a buzzsaw. I was on the farewell calling lists, having to see people and take leave and so forth.

Q: Do you still send out PPC cards?

SMYTHE: [Laughter] No. I did calls on all of the people. I think maybe a few PPC cards got sent, but I made the rounds. Not wholesale, the way they used to.

Q: Where would you slot in your experience as an ambassador in the overall story of your life? How would it rate? You've done so many interesting things.

SMYTHE: In terms of personal stature, it would rank pretty close to the top. In terms of personal satisfaction, it would rank along with some others. I found the experience at the New Lincoln School, exerting educational leadership at a time when education was really on trial-people were trying to restructure so many things-a very exciting time, and a lot of it was very satisfying, particularly since so many of the students were able and seriously interested in contributing to the outcome. I enjoyed that.

I think the two years in Japan were especially helpful. Those set the groundwork for my whole career in international affairs. It was my first experience head-on with another culture. I had been out of this country only to visit Canada before that. Well, no.

I keep forgetting all the rest of my travels in Syria, which came before Cameroon. I was thinking of my connection with Africa; the Crossroads experience was valuable, too.

I think being part of the preparation team for the school segregation cases, of the team preparing for that, gave me for the first time a sense of participating in history. I knew that this would be something that would be of historic significance, and it was important for me to contribute in any way I could. Oh, it was a tremendously satisfying experience, and quite a challenge.

If I had to characterize myself, though, I'd have to say that I'm more jack-of-all-trades than a specialist at something. I've come to terms with the fact that if you are highly gifted in one stream, you're more likely to have a great impact in what you're doing, because a bullet does have more impact than a charge of buckshot. But on the other hand, I just enjoy so many things about this world that I would feel deprived if I couldn't let some things grow along with some other things. I'd be very hard put to specialize and stick with my last and try to become great at one thing.

Q: Did you have any experience of decompression when you came back to the States and were deputy assistant secretary?

SMYTHE: No. It was compression all over again. I arrived in March. Zimbabwe was just about to celebrate its independence. On the 18th of April, the coup in Liberia took place. I plunged into refugee affairs, and within a year, African refugees were the most numerous refugees in the world, I was attending an international conference convened for the purpose of dealing with this problem. I found the refugee issue a very challenging and interesting one. I had a feeling that I knew what a refugee felt like, a little bit, when we had to flee from Syria without being able to be briefed on precisely what was going to happen, or how long we'd be where we were going. We were going to Rome for safe haven.

Q: That very helpless feeling.

SMYTHE: Yes. I was particularly concerned for mothers with young children who had to be separated from their husbands. In fact, I shared my seat with a three-year-old when we were evacuated from Beirut. Pan Am put two children or an adult and one child into one first-class seat, and so I took this little three-year-old, whose mother was occupied with an eight-month-old child. (She was from our embassy in Syria. Her husband was the defense attaché.) Just keeping children reassured, when so many of them had to be separated from their parents, was an important task.

Q: Since you were an ambassador, have you gone back to Phelps-Stokes?

SMYTHE: Technically, I was considered on leave of absence at Phelps-Stokes, but I went to Northwestern instead because the Herscovits chair had some sentimental value for us. My husband was Mel Herscovits's third Ph.D. at Northwestern in African studies, and we had known him personally, and his family, and it was a prestigious chair. Going back to Phelps-Stokes also involved raising money. I enjoy developing programs, but raising money for them was a chore that I could do without. In fact, my secretary, Mona, would come to me in Cameroon when I felt that there were too many problems on my desk for the moment. I would say, "My goodness, Mona, I don't know how we'll get through all of these in the next twenty-four hours." She'd lean over and say, "It beats fund-raising." [Hearty laughter] So that was our private joke. Anytime the going got rough, it beat fund-raising.

Q: Was that chair for a specific time period?

SMYTHE: It was for a specific time period. It was really supposed to be for one quarter, but it was extended to two years, after which they simply appointed me to the regular faculty for the other two years I was there, so that instead of being just a visiting professor, I'm actually professor emeritus now at Northwestern. And I did enjoy the four years there.

Q: You were actually teaching classes?

SMYTHE: Yes. Not very many, not more than two at a time, usually one at a time, one a quarter. I was developing programs and supervising dissertation research and that sort of thing. I was co-director of a very interesting program to take business management students and send them to Africa-I've mentioned it before-and that was one of the very delightful ways of exercising my interest in building business ties between Africa and the United States.

Now, the first tie I put up, I had a very interesting assignment when I came back as deputy assistant secretary. I had about eleven things I was responsible for. One of them that took a major part of my time was refugees. The African refugee concerns had become bigger and bigger and bigger, and I was the chief person in the African bureau to follow up on that and work closely with the Bureau of Refugee Programs. So I spent a good deal of time on it, and after I left for Northwestern, I directed two dissertations on the subject of refugees and am still in touch with the young men who wrote them. One hasn't finished, and I'll have to go out for his dissertation examination. I remained interested in that subject, with at least a third of my time devoted to it while I was in the State Department; I was a delegate to the ICARA conference [International Conference to Assist Refugees in Africa, Geneva 1981] as a result, and my research at the Woodrow Wilson Center was on African refugees.

Q: When was the Woodrow Wilson research?

SMYTHE: That was in 1982. I went to China that summer in June, and then came back and spent July, August, and almost all of September in Washington at the Center. I told you, I think, of my concern that to treat refugees in isolation without considering the programs of the countries they were going to and their development plans was to ignore a very important relationship, and I've done some speaking and writing on that, as well.

Q: You do a lot of lecturing, don't you?

SMYTHE: Yes, a fair amount. I've done less this year. The last real lecture series I did was in Africa in 1985 in six African countries for USIA.

In my travels around Africa, I had run into Vincent Rotundo in Senegal, who was deeply interested in a Phelps-Stokes program of exchange of professors that I was working on. I don't remember speaking in Senegal there, and yet I think I did speak somewhere there. Anyway, he called me one day in 1984 and said, "I'm retiring tomorrow, and I had promised myself I would get you on an AMPART program for Africa. Could you possibly go to Africa and speak next February?"

I said, "Yes, I could." Northwestern has very liberal leave policy where something like that is concerned. So I went over. It happened I wasn't teaching at all that quarter, so I had a chance to the whole month and the first part of March talking about women's and minority progress in the United States. They wanted to know what American women had been doing, and women's rights took over that whole program. I had never spoken on women's rights before, but there was enormous curiosity about it, and many of the men were curious about how they could show that they were in the twentieth century, too, what did they need to know and what did they need to plan?

When I left Uganda, I told you about the interest of the President of Uganda, who had seen me on television and asked me to call on him, but I was leaving and had to settle for the Minister of Information. I talked to the Minister of Information for about an hour, and we worked out a program of training women to be business managers. We were going to ask Northwestern University to send over a visiting team to teach at Makerere. The interesting thing is, even though the President is now no longer in office, [the President was deposed within a few months, and there was no longer any government authority interested in the program] I wouldn't be a bit surprised if it would be possible at the university anyway.

Q: What's next for you, now that you're an emeritus professor? Did you give up that because you were getting married again?

SMYTHE: Partly, but I had reached retirement age, and I really wanted to do some writing. I've always wanted to write, and I have a lot of things I want to write about. I want to try my hand at biography; I've never done it. So what I have ahead in the next six months is a lot of reading of biography and a lot of reading about biographical techniques and deciding how I want to do it.

Q: Do you have a subject selected?

SMYTHE: I think that I'm convinced that the lives of great people are inspiring and I'm convinced that a lot of young people need positive and contributing role models. Our society isn't deteriorating for no reason at all. We have plenty of froth on the tube; I don't think we pay serious attention to the lives of people who have accomplished something and who can make a contribution to the rest of us by being positive role models for young people. I don't write for children, and I haven't taught young children. High school is as elementary as I've gotten.

Q: You're thinking around the junior high years, or even younger?

SMYTHE: I'm thinking that junior high years and younger would be good, but I don't know how to write for the younger ones. Doubleday once had a project of teaming a serious academic person with a children's writer, and Elliott Skinner did a book on Africa. He doesn't know how to write for children, either, but he had a very good coauthor who had had considerable experience. So I want to encourage that kind of collaboration. I really want to think in terms of adults and let somebody else adapt them to children. When I meet authors of children's books (or potential authors) I try to interest them in the idea.

Q: It was certainly no dearth of interest in your life. And you'll be staying in Washington?

SMYTHE: We haven't committed ourselves for all time, but probably. For the foreseeable future, anyway. It seems strange to think of deciding where you're going to settle down. I've never been acutely uncomfortable anywhere I've been. I like it here, and, you're right, there's a lot that goes on, and you see your old friends all the time, because if they don't live here, they come to visit.

Q: Well, you certainly have had a fascinating life, and I thank you very much for sharing it with us. I am most appreciative.

SMYTHE: And not a small reward is getting to know you.

Q: Oh, thank you.

End of interview